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May 2002

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Master Of Orion 3

It's the greatest sci-fi strategy franchise in the universe and the latest version is only a handful of months away. Timothy C Best goes deep undercover to sneak an exclusive detailed first look at this impressive title from the masters of turn-based empire building

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HALO

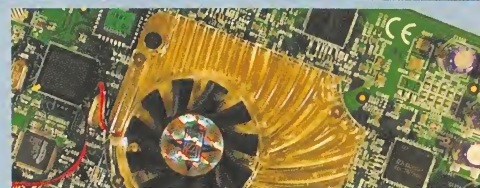
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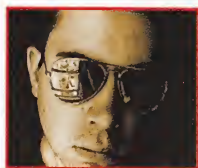


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Subscribers - VICTORY!



This month, this part of the magazine is dedicated to a very special group of people this month - our subscribers. As anyone who's visited the website at

www.pcpowerplay.com.au over the

past couple of months will know, subscribers to PCPP have been voicing their concerns about the whole experience of laying down a meaty wad of cash for a whole year's worth of their favourite magazine.

It would be great if we out here in running-a-business-land could believe that saving a whole lot of money by subscribing was enough for you folks, but we recognise that not only do you subscribe to save, you also subscribe to get the mag before the riff-raff out in newsagent-land get their dirty paws on it (but Gawd luv ya, newsagent-land, Gawd luv ya). And not only that, subscribers should be getting exactly the same product as the newsagent-land folks, right down to the plastic CD cases.

Unfortunately for that couple of years, subscribers have not been getting the CD cases, their CDs have been coming in little plastic slips which could often result in damaged or even shattered discs. Add to this the very real emotional pain caused by the subscription copies getting posted out about the same time as the mags went to the newsagents, leaving our loyal and precious subscribers with no CD cases and a mag they get in the post three or four days after all the newsagent-land folks have already pawed all through it.

So we said enough was enough. We took up the great sword of the crusade, and we ran rampant through the streets of Sydney looking for a mailing house that would both put the CD cases in with the mag, and then post that mag so it had a fighting chance to get to subscribers before the rest of the mags got to newsagents. We searched high, we searched low, we used sniffer dogs, trained assassins, private detectives, ASIO and a bunch of American guys in trenchcoats. We searched for two months. And what do you know? We found one.

So now we can proudly announce that subscribers get everything newsagent-land people can get, and not only that, we're currently making a whole bunch of shady deals to offer PCPP subscribers special deals on all sorts of funky products. Stay tuned, but in the meantime, we now confidently believe there has never been a better time to subscribe to PC PowerPlay. You want preferential treatment, don't you? You want your mag hermetically sealed don't you? You don't want to have to handle a mag that a hundred sweaty boys have already handled at the train station, do you? Flip to page 86 now... you can even get the DVD version!

Anthony Fordham

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An apology is in order. Last month we reviewed Dark Age of Camelot, a rather nifty MMORPG. In the review, we listed the distributor as Various, since the game doesn't actually have an official Australian distributor. While this was technically correct, we should have listed Thumpers Game Zone, of Croydon VIC as the distributor of this particular copy of the game. Thumper makes a special point of importing PC games, especially those that don't get an Aussie distribution, and we here at PCPP think he provides an excellent service. You can give Thumper a call on 03 9725 0833

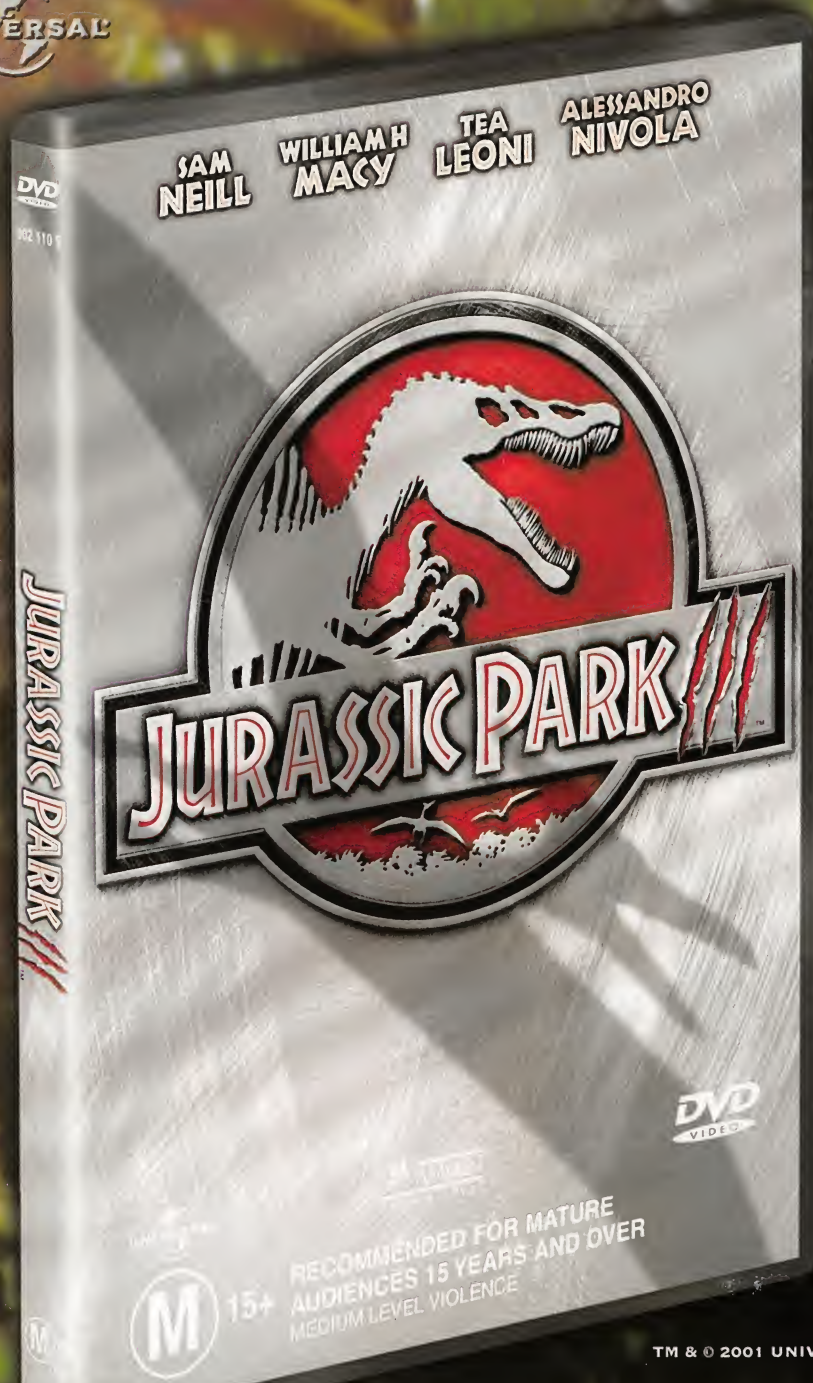


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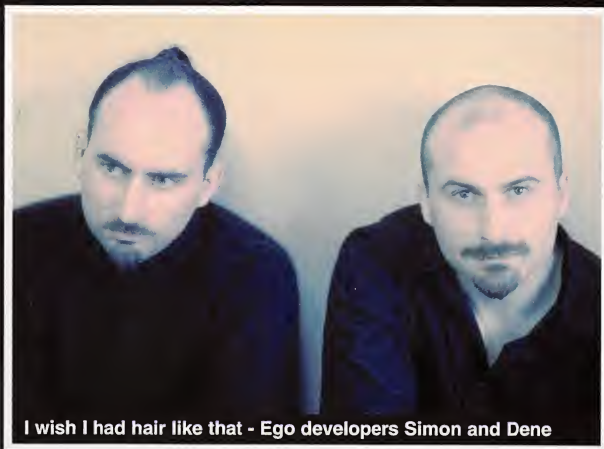
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I wish I had hair like that - Ego developers Simon and Dene



Project Ego (working title)

It's definitely not a dirty word



Behold my chest tattoos of +12 raunchiness



Charming pastorate meets hack'n'slash gore



Includes the latest in chronographic technology

With concepts stemming from RPG, adventure and sim games, Project Ego is truly hard to pin down in terms of genre. Rather than generating a character to follow a set story, Ego gives total freedom with the world and character development. Starting as a child the player has control over what happens during the course of the character's life. You can try to rid the world of Albion of its ills or conversely you could become one of the world's ills by leading a life of crime and debauchery. The choice is yours. Rather than utilising a stat- or skills-based system, what you do in Ego is reflected in your character. If you do a lot of physical labour your character will build muscle mass and on the flip side of the coin if you do little physical activity you run the risk of obesity and ill health. Spend too much time in the sun and you will get a tan - too much time indoors or underground and you will develop an unhealthy pallor. Wear fashionable clothing and the people you meet are more likely to treat you with respect but gad about in a loin cloth and people will treat you as an uncouth barbarian. The actions of the player will directly effect the direction in which the story will go, and though there are a number of scripted events not all of them will be applicable to each character. No details have been released as to what the overall plot or story of the game will be as yet, though we do know that the actual story-line will be quite linear compared to the rest of the game. How the character approaches the plot is anything but linear - they can tackle it any way they want. We've been lucky enough to be given some developer diaries from Big Blue box about their trials and tribulations in putting the game together, So enjoy!

Developer:	Lionhead (Big Blue Box)
Distributor:	Lionhead
Publisher:	TBA
Due: Late	May 2003

Out of the Blue - The Big Blue Box Diaries By Dene and Simon Carter

Surely it's everyone's dream to start their own game development studio? The promise of creative freedom; the opportunity to work with talented, like-minded individuals; the certain knowledge that every long friendless night spent getting a monitor sun-tan is worth it? In 1985 we made a solemn, brotherly vow that, one-day, we'd give it a go - just as soon as Simon got through puberty. It only took us 13 years to put the plan in motion, and after 2 months of pointless, exhaustive wrangling over the company name Dene uttered the historic words 'Oh bugger, I don't suppose Big Blue Box sounds too stupid does it?'

Choosing your studio's first game isn't easy. Finding financial backing is obviously the number one priority, and publishers prefer risky, untested startup companies to be fairly conservative with their design proposals. If you don't want your proposal to be dropped quicker than a poo sandwich then your first game should follow the 'Three Golden Rules of the Startup':

- 1) The game should be small in scale, in a well-defined genre and, preferably, involve breasts and/or cars.
- 2) The design should be based around existing technology, or at least be technically uncomplicated.
- 3) It should have a nice, catchy title.

As such, we had a number of problems on our hands.

We wanted to create a roleplaying game like no other. The world would be a breathtakingly beautiful place filled with waterfalls, mountains, dense forests, populated with compelling and convincing characters with real personality, people who actually reacted to what you did. We wanted to give the player control of a hero who would adapt to the way they played, who would age, become scarred in battle, who could get tattoos, wear dreadlocks and a dress if the player was so inclined. We wanted each and every person who played our game to

have a unique experience, to have their own stories to tell. And we called it 'Thingy.'

This was going to be tougher than we'd thought.

It was a passing, drunken conversation with Peter Molyneux that changed our lives. We'd worked with Peter for years, on games like Dungeon Keeper and Magic Carpet, and it was during one of our regular board gaming evenings that Simon brought up the headaches involved in designing your company's first game. Peter had recently founded Lionhead and had run into the same problems himself, so he was very sympathetic, and when we compared notes we had very similar ideas about the hurdles facing new studios:

- Publishers loathe 'risk', yet risk is the key to the new, exciting games that drive our industry.

- An ambitious title needs cutting edge technology, graphics, sound, level design and testing - more than a small team could possibly create with the average budget and time restrictions.

- Fledgling studios can spend a huge amount time dealing with the day-to-day running of the business, instead of actually developing computer games.

To combat these, we needed credibility with publishers; we needed more resources; we needed the freedom to develop games, not push paper. Within a month, we had worked out a potential solution to all the problems facing us: Lionhead would create the 'Lionhead Satellites', a scheme to support new studios creating original games. The idea was that Lionhead would provide us with technology, testing, design, PR and business support, leaving us free to actually develop our game. It was a fantastic idea, one that provided us with the confidence and the backing we badly needed, and made one of our best friends in the industry our business partner.

Now if we could just find a publisher...

Why Project Ego Deserves a Second Look:

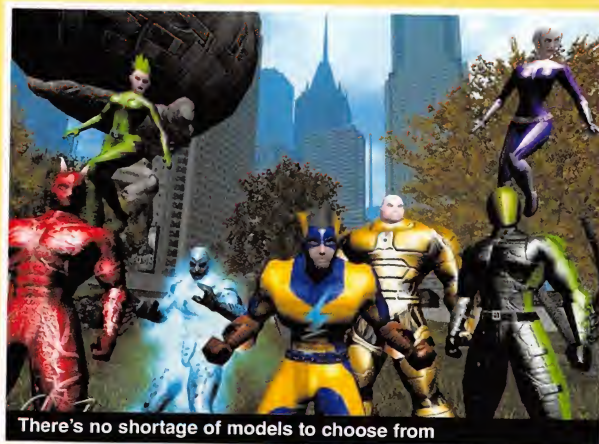


Magic makes you go bald

Fully interactive game world

More Molyneux inspired insanity

Anything with the title Ego has to be good!



There's no shortage of models to choose from

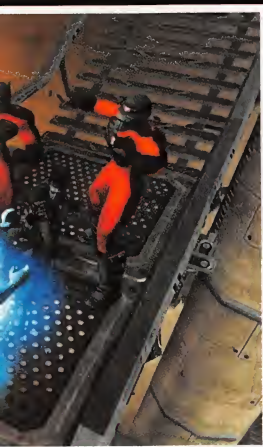


City of Heroes

Where Freedom Force meets Ultima Online



Buns of death!



I am Licorice Allsort Man!



Edward... you've changed

MORPG has taken many different forms over the last few years, ranging from fantasy to science fiction, ancient history to modern warfare. It's pretty safe to say, however, that City of Heroes is the first to cater to the particular fetish of Super Heroes. Welcome to Paragon City, the most famous city in America and home to its mightiest heroes and villains. It is the most super-human friendly city in the world - the citizens of lovely Paragon City adore their heroes, bathing them in adulation and applause. Its history is a immense and intricate as the highest towers of the city but more than anything it is the place that the vast majority of the world's super-human population call home and would die to protect.

Many different good and evil organisations operate throughout the city, ranging from the heroic Dawn Patrol and Department of Extra Normal Affairs (DENA) to the down right nasty Freakshow and Circle of Thorns. Luckily for the gentlepeoples of Paragon City, players fall onto the side of light, only being able to play heroes. A range of choices is given to starting characters as far as attributes, powers and

appearance is concerned. Working off a skill style interface rather than a level interface, starting characters can choose from around 40 powers (each with their own set of sub-powers) and put experience points into different powers and attributes to shape the role of the character. The costume and appearance of the character is also very malleable whether it be facial hair or boots having a number of different skins that may be selected. Utilising this system, literally millions of different permutations of character and appearance can be achieved.

One very nice feature that should play a prominent role in City of Heroes will be the Arena. No PvP combat can take place in the game world so there is no need to worry about your new character finding a source of great power, causing you to become the target of attacks from other players. If players do want to duke it out to see who is the best at what they do (and what they do ain't pretty - thank you Wolverine), they can opt to step into a specially built structure that caters for this desire without fear of death or loss of

fame. This is the Arena. This may come as a bit of a disappointment to some players but the rest of us can sigh in relief and get back to playing our colourful alter egos.

City of Heroes is powered by the spec built Cryptic engine, which, if all of the hype turns out to be true should be an absolute gem of design. The engine incorporates a game client, server client and tools client all tightly interwoven and promises to deliver fast paced fluid 3D and still be very lenient on bandwidth usage. All of us poor modem users out there can keep our fingers crossed that this will actually be the case. A real time in-game editor will allow the game designers to seamlessly add in new features and missions for download and play without any need to overhaul the server or temporarily put the service off line. City of Heroes is due for a late winter release this year so it's time to get the tights out of storage and knock the dust off your mask and gloves because it's not too long now until there's going to be some villains who need a righteous beat-down.

Developer:	Cryptic Studios
Publisher:	TBA
Distributor:	TBA
Due:	3rd Quarter 2002

Why City of Heroes Deserves a Second Look:



Super Heroes kick arse

A Player Killer free zone

Customise the game to your heart's content

It reminds us of Freedom Force

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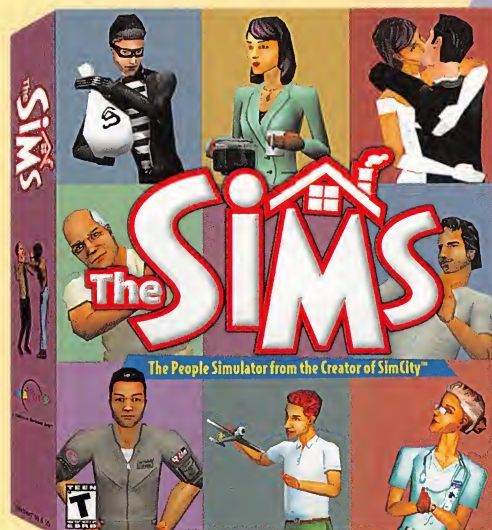
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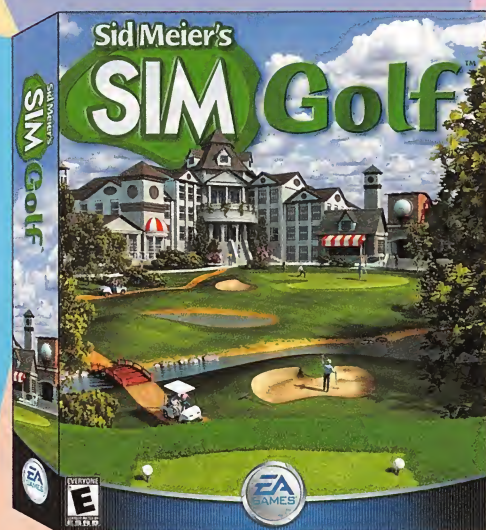
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TREK TECH

Star Trek fans should rejoice with the announcement of the development of transparent aluminum. By subjecting the metal to immense heat and pressure a German ceramics researcher has made a transparent metal around 3 times tougher than steel. Though it has nothing to do with gaming we thought it was cool.

MEDIA PLAYER 8

Windows Media Player 8 that comes free with the Windows XP operating system logs the music and films played on the system. Whilst this information is not yet being sold for market research purposes it does raise some serious privacy issues. The log file also cannot be erased without killing the player.

SON OF SPECTRE

In a move that makes real life more like a game the American Airforce will soon launch a new laser equipped combat plane. Code-named "Son of Spectre" the plane will carry a chemical oxygen iodine laser (COIL) capable of highly accurate and damaging attacks.

TEKKEN MOVIE

Production Company Crystal Sky has nabbed the rights to make the film version of the highly popular Tekken fighting game franchise. With a budget of around \$60 million, the Tekken film will be released some time next year. There are no cast and crew details as yet but fingers are crossed that it doesn't suck as bad as the anime.

UnderAsh

Ethnic Cleansing and racism in games.

After the debacle with GTA

3 we all know the stand of the OFLC (Office Of Film and Literature Classification) on sex and violence in computer games. What we don't know is their stand on racism in games. It has recently come to our attention that a number of games have popped up on the internet, either for download or for retail sale that contain serious depictions of racism, genocide and racially motivated violence. With names such as Ethnic Cleansing and Kill the Nigga, these games have by and large been developed by white supremacist groups to spread their message on a mass-market scale. Due to the fact that these games can be freely downloaded there is little the OFLC can do to stem their distribution so the choice remains with the individual person as to whether they wish to play. A thread on our message boards showed a universal revulsion with these games. The right of people not to play what they do not agree with was clearly exercised.

Unfortunately the waters become a little muddled when looking at some of the other

games around. A new Arab created game known as UnderAsh entreats players to shoot or throw rocks at Israelis because of the desecration of Palestine and the holy lands. On the one hand it seems like UnderAsh is a game exhorting players to racially motivated violence much like the white supremacist games, but on the other is it any worse than any of the games we already have on the shelves where the Arab communities are portrayed as the villains to be shot and killed? The question of where the line should be drawn considering racism in games is a very gray one.

Hypothetically, if the OFLC was to ban games such as UnderAsh and Ethnic Cleansing they could also use the same grounds to take a number of other games off the shelves for the same reason. What level of racial violence is too much? We tried to contact the OFLC to get an answer but as yet they have been unavailable for comment. If and when we find out more on the issue of racism in games you'll be the first to know, but as far as the issue stands it is, as always up to personal discretion as to whether you want to play or not.



The ugly face of gaming



Art imitating real life conflict



Stupid hats are all the rage

Running With Scissors.

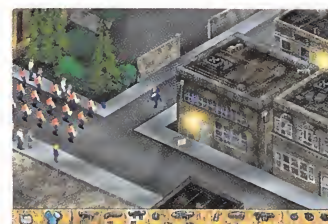
Go Postal, again.

Continuing with the OFLC

thread, it definitely looks like the next game by the world's most dangerous game developers, Running With Scissors will never grace our hallowed shores. Postal 2, the sequel to the previously banned Postal will feature even more antisocial behavior, this time helped by motion capture specialists House of Moves. The game will feature a heavily armed madman running around in first person killing people indiscriminately. A huge amount of motion capture has been taken to ensure that Postal 2 is

the single most depraved looking game ever. According to Running With Scissors CEO Vince Desi that's the whole point. According to Desi, "It was friggin' beautiful! It was like a ballet choreographed by Tarantino, but with more guns, deader dead guys and sexier women. Motion capture allows us to accurately animate a guy doing stuff he usually does in private, you know...like masturbating while on fire."

Still, Postal 2 looks to be another triumph of freedom of speech over a responsibility not to make a nob of yourself.



Postal - Pixelated killing spree



"I regret nothing"

Nintendo's Latest Victim

Idiot loses game and life

A woman from Baton Rouge, Louisiana is suing Nintendo for "unspecified damages" following the death of her 30 year old son after a marathon session on his N64 console. Apparently the man had some kind of seizure whilst playing the machine, cracked his skull, fell into a coma and never woke up. Apart from the fact that the man was 30 years old and still living with his mother, the story gets more tragic the further you get into the facts.

The man first suffered seizures in 1999 when he first bought the console but instead of dissuading him from playing they just seemed to spur him on. Instead of doing the logical thing and resting he would spend up to 8 hours a day, 6 days a week obsessively playing his N64. He played despite the standard epilepsy warning that comes packaged with every Nintendo game and openly states that people may have seizures or blackouts triggered by the flashes of light in many games.

Even more specifically the warning states; "anyone who has had a seizure, loss of awareness, or other symptom linked to an epileptic condition should consult

a doctor before playing a video game" and ends by suggesting in big capital letters that you should "stop playing immediately if you experience any of these symptoms while using the console". In light of this it seems hard that the mans mother would be suing Nintendo for loss of her son's "future earnings". The big question that needs to be asked at this point is what could the son possibly earn when all he did was sit with his arse stuck to a couch playing Mario 64 48 hours a week? Unless he was a games reviewer like your friends here at PC PowerPlay then that would be a big old nothing.

Strangely enough Nintendo is denying any responsibility for the mans death but are not entirely in the clear. A similar case was tried last year (also in Louisiana...is there a pattern forming here?) where the jury ruled that Nintendo "did not provide an adequate warning concerning the risk of seizures". It's nice to know that in this day and age where Australia has imported most of our culture from other places around the world we can still look at something, shake our heads sadly and say in a weary and knowing voice "only in America".



Doesn't it look like a killer to you?



He wants to kill your children



"Neentendow ain't hurt me none"

BYTESIZE



CAR WINDOWS

Microsoft is pushing to have its Windows CE operating system used in car dashboard computers. The computers will be used primarily for navigation but it brings a whole new meaning to the term "blue screen of death". It's only fitting that the abbreviation of the OS should be WinCE.

XBOX WORRIES

Within 10 days of the Xbox launch in Japan Microsoft had received nearly 250 calls complaining that the next generation console had scratched CDs and DVDs to the point of them being unusable. Microsoft is currently blaming the problem on user error but will look further into it.

416 MB VIDEO CARD

3D Labs have recently released their new super-high end graphics board. Designed for complex and highly detailed rendering the Wildcat III 6210 has a staggering 416Mb of onboard RAM. There's no real reason to drool over the card at this point since it's useless for gaming but still...

SIERRA CHANGE

Games company Sierra has recently announced they will be changing their name to Sierra Entertainment to better reflect the broad range of entertainment the company produces for PC and consoles. Previously known as Sierra Online the company is owned by Vivendi Universal Publishing.

Deadset Legend

Now has more expensive option

In early Feb Sony Online announced the launch of a new premier service for EverQuest called EverQuest Legends. The service which will set user back a hefty \$39.95 (US) a month will allow a greater interactivity with the online world than ever before. Subscribers will be offered many additional features and some exclusive content for their money. Some of the new services offered will be new quests, story arcs, personalised web pages, guildhalls and powerful new "legendary" items. With some

of the new quests special items may even be named after the character that found them, forever leaving their mark on the world.

A number of people have expressed concern that people who pay for the premier service will have an unfair advantage over other players due to the power of some of the new items. Sony has stated that this is not the case but gamers still remain suspicious.

Meanwhile Timothy C Best is in a serious but stable condition after losing his soul to EQ: Shadows of Luclin...



"\$40 a month and I'm still losing"



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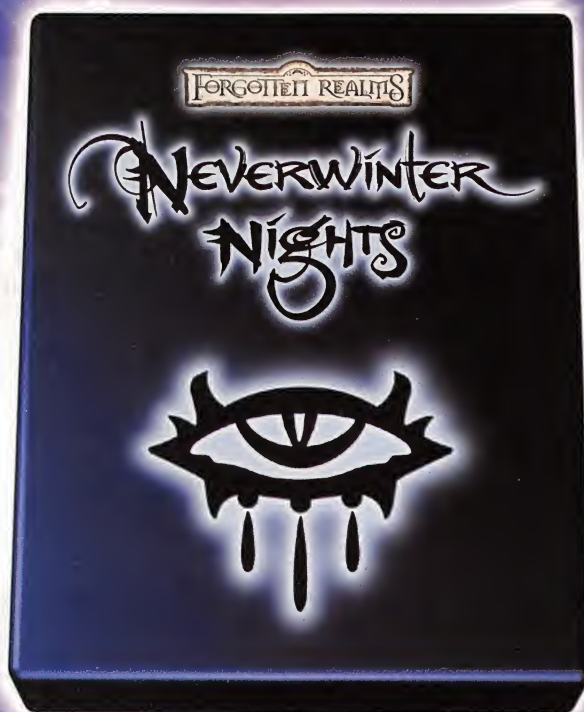
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- Computer Gaming World



From the Developer of Baldur's Gate, Tales of the Sword Coast,
Baldur's Gate II: Shadows of Amn, and Baldur's Gate II: Throne of Bhaal.

BYTESIZE



RAVEN SHIELD

Red Storm Entertainment recently announced the development of the new episode in their highly popular squad based shooter, Rainbow Six. The new game, titled Raven Shield is slated for release in late 2002 and will be built around the next generation Unreal engine. The game will feature 15 terrorist busting single player missions.

HOUSE OF THE DEAD

With the imminent release of the Resident Evil movie, Sega has jumped on the bandwagon by selling the rights to their successful trilogy, House of the Dead. A new company, Mindfire Millennium that will specialise in adapting games and comics for the screen, will produce the movie.

BETTER BATTERIES

An interesting technological fact - researchers believe that if portable battery technology had progressed over the last few decades at the same rate as computer hardware, the common AA battery would now hold more energy than a tactical nuclear bomb. Computer hardware doubles speed every 18 months on average where batteries only manage a 5% increase in the same amount of time.

GAMES INNOCENT

Good news for Sony Entertainment, id Software and 9 other game companies as a judge has ruled that they are innocent of any implication in the Columbine High School massacre. Parents of some of the slain students blamed computer games and movies for the massacre - the law thought otherwise.

Annual Awards announced

Like the Oscars, only smaller

The Academy of Interactive Arts and Sciences (AIAS) announced the winners of their 5th annual achievement awards on the 2nd of March, 2002. The gala event held in Las Vegas was attended by a number of computer gaming, television and film celebrities including Resident Evil director, Paul Anderson and Sid Meier, a man who needs no introduction. The voting process, much like the Oscars is made up of a peer panel review board that selects the games for each category. After the finalists are chosen the peer panel members review the submissions in their area of expertise. Final balloting is overseen by Pricewaterhouse Coopers, an independent accounting firm and takes place over the Internet with all eligible members of AIAS being allowed to vote.

Halo: Combat Evolved for the Xbox won game of the year as well as 3 other awards and it was a good year for PC and the next-generation all round. The awards won by PC and Xbox are as follows:

Outstanding Achievement in Animation
Oddworld: Munch's Oddysee (XBOX)

Outstanding Achievement in Musical Composition
Tropico (PC)

Outstanding Achievement in Visual Engineering
Halo: Combat Evolved (XBOX)

Action/Adv Game of the Year
Halo: Combat Evolved (XBOX)

Fighting Game of the Year
Dead or Alive 3 (XBOX)

Console Game of the Year
Halo: Combat Evolved (XBOX)

Online Gameplay of the Year
Return to Castle Wolfenstein (PC)

Massive Multiplayer / Persistent World Game of the Year
Dark Age of Camelot (PC)

PC Action/Adventure Game of the Year
Return to Castle Wolfenstein (PC)

PC RolePlaying Game of the Year
Baldur's Gate II: Throne of Bhaal (PC)

Simulation Game of the Year
Microsoft Flight Simulator 2002 (PC)

Sports Game of the Year
FIFA 2002 (PC)

Strategy Game of the Year
Sid Meier's Civilization III (PC)

Innovation in Computer Gaming
Black & White (PC)

PC Computer Game of the Year
Black & White (PC)

Game of the Year
Halo: Combat Evolved (XBOX)



Halo - game of the year



Black and White still impresses



DOA3 beats all other fighting games

QuakeCon 2K2 announced

Win money for being l33t

Id Software and the QuakeCon team have released the dates for QuakeCon 2K2, one of the biggest LAN events in the world. To be held in Mesquite, Texas, QuakeCon 2k2 will be a BYOC (Bring Your Own Computer) event and will see competition between thousands of players in the 35,000 square foot Mesquite Convention Centre. This year players will be able to choose between Quake 3 Arena deathmatch competitions or Return To Castle Wolfenstein team based multiplayer competition. With prizes of up to

\$50,000(US) you can rest assured that the competition will be fast and furious.

"QuakeCon sets the standard for gaming events with four days of LAN-events, tournaments, exhibitor displays and conferences," John Carney, executive director, The QuakeCon Organization, said. "With id Software's continual support, including the addition of Return to Castle Wolfenstein to this year's event, and the dedication of our talented QuakeCon staff, QuakeCon 2K2 is shaping up to be the best event to date."



They sure got me quakin'



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BYTESIZE



3D MARK UPGRADE

Popular 3D benchmarking tool 3DMark 2001 has been given a little touch up recently. The 3DMark 2001 Second Edition provides extra software and hardware support along with Pixel Shader 1.4 compliance. Grab it at www.madonion.com

ATI MARKET SHARE

With a 42% market share, ATI is the number one retail video card supplier for 2001 in the US according to market research group NPD Intellect. ATI also produced six of the top ten selling boards for the year. Bad luck to that old warhorse nVidia

220GHZ IBM CPU

IBM has developed the fastest silicon transistor ever made with the ability to function at a blazing 220GHz. Commercial use is still a while off but the potential it may bring to the wider computing world is truly drool worthy.

RDRAM DROPPED

Intel will drop support for Direct RAMBUS DRAMs in the second half of this year. After a problematic introduction to first the Pentium 3 and then the Pentium 4, Intel will now embrace DDR and SDR SDRAM. Wicked!

Intel Developer Forum

Scheduled for Spring 2002

The Intel Developer Forum is one of most exciting technological conferences going around today. This year's Spring IDF (or autumn for us Down Under) brought together more than 4000 attendees from over 50 countries to the San Francisco Moscone Centre for four days worth of continuous techno-lust.

Heading off the show was none other than Intel CEO Craig Barrett and his demonstrations using an air-cooled 3GHz Pentium 4 processor. Using such a powerful machine, Barrett was able to show off software made by an Intel sponsored company called Realviz. With Realviz technology, 2D digital still images can be transformed into 3D worlds and models. All this using a consumer level digital camera! The potential is enormous especially for 3D game development. It'll allow whole cities to be mapped out in 3D with the utmost detail and accuracy. Realviz will be apparently used in the upcoming sequel to the Matrix.

Also on the 3GHz machine came the demonstration of the real-world application of a 100Mbps (12.5 MB/s) Internet connection. Barrett was able to demonstrate the streaming of two

HDTV screens onto a PC without hardware HDTV decoding capabilities. Not satisfied with this, the demonstration was taken a step further by including a third stream and then rendering all three displays onto a rotating 3D cube. All this ran without any noticeable stuttering or slowdown.

Intel also reaffirmed its support for the IA-64 architecture used in the Itanium and upcoming 64-bit processors. A few more bits and pieces were released about upcoming successors to the Itanium. The upcoming McKinley has already been tested at 1GHz and will include 3MB of L3 cache and a quad-pumped 100MHz FSB. Madison will take it a step further with the move to a 0.13-micron process. A slightly less powerful Madison known as Deerfield will head Intel's push into the entry-level server market. The move to a 0.09-micron process will be in the form of Montecito and is expected in 2004. Intel also released the first snippets on Prescott using a next generation NetBurst core.

Other goodies such as 533MHz RAMBUS, sleek looking concept PCs and Serial ATA were also on show. All in all, IDF was once again a huge success.



Realviz at work



Intel CEO Craig Barrett



Matrix 2 before Realviz

AMD's Hammer Demo

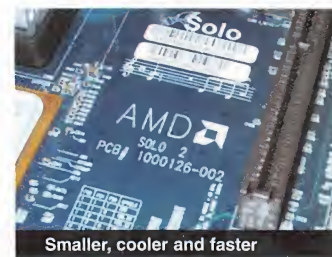
New products to smash the competition

AMD's plans to introduce a 64-bit processor in the form of Clawhammer and Sledgehammer have been known for a while now. Finally, a working version of the upcoming Clawhammer processor has been announced and demonstrated!

Physical appearance of the chip differs quite a bit from the Athlon XP. Most notable is the inclusion of a Pentium4-esque integrated heat spreader. This is very much a welcomed addition and should eliminate or at the very least dramatically reduce the incidence of eager folks

crushing fragile cores. The pins on the belly are now more densely packed. Clawhammer has 754 pins up from 462 on the Athlon. Also present at the presentation was AMD's reference board for the Clawhammer, using an AMD-8000 chipset with HyperTransport, AGP 8X and all the jazz.

The demonstration itself included testing on Windows XP and a 64-bit Linux port. Although not at full speed, the testing went about with minimal fuss and confirmed the Hammer was indeed alive and kicking.



Smaller, cooler and faster



64-bit goodness

It's a lot easier to take on an army



when you are one.

DUNGEON SIEGE

A ROLE-PLAYING GAME FROM CHRIS TAYLOR

Assemble and control a party of up to eight heroes at a time, as you battle your way through the seamless and expansive 3D world of Ehb. From warriors and archers to wizards, and even pack mules to carry your treasure, you and your party will take revenge on the evil lord's minions. Whether you're playing alone or in multiplayer mode, victory is within your grasp. Let the battles begin.

microsoft.com/games/dungeonsiege



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Australia's Most Wanted

Where you tell us what you're looking forward to...



Hitman 2



IGI 2 Covert Strike



Jedi Outcast

It seems pretty clear that you're not going to be happy until a certain few games are released. You still want Freedom Force, even more so than ever before. You still want Warcraft 3. Our suggestion to you - pretend to be a child again and hold your breath until you are given what you wanted. It may not work but it's definitely worth a try. A few new faces this month in the forms of Deus Ex 2, Hitman 2 and Tony Hawk 3. If Tony Hawk 3 on the PC is any bit as good as it is on the consoles then you can expect to see it racing up the charts.

AUSTRALIA'S MOST WANTED

- 1 Freedom Force
- 2 Warcraft III: Reign of Chaos
- 3 Deus Ex 2
- 4 Dungeon Siege
- 5 JK 2: Jedi Outcast
- 6 Morrowind
- 7 IGI 2
- 8 Hitman 2
- 9 Neverwinter Nights
- 10 Tony Hawk 3

Send your entries to
amw@pcpowerplay.com.au



Tony Hawk 3



Hitman 2



Dungeon Siege

dr claw



good evening to you all my champions of the 133+ i say evening because it is always evening in my room now because of what my pet did to the climate control system. yes indeed i have now got a new pet after all the helpful suggestions from my peers and friends on the website which is at www.pcpowerplay.com.au. there were lots of ideas and some people said i should get a three-toed sloth because i would be able to keep up with it well i say pish paw to that idea i am 133+ and i can move fast as a very fast thing so don't worry about me in that department. and then someone who is a comedian said i should get a llama well ha ha to you my funky friend i sent you an email bomb and now you will be getting lots of letters from crazyminx's friends the russian mafiosi and your credit card will get ripped off because i h4x0rized you. anyway someone else said i should use theo the old pcpp mascot who is a shambler from quake and i thought that was a good idea except that shamblers are not real plus my dad

would not buy me one. what i got then was a second hand aibo which is a robot dog from sony or nintendo or someone and it was pretty cool and i was its dad and i taught it new tricks and stuff. but it seems that it has some kind of malfunction and the emotion of love has been replaced with the emotion of psychotic insanity so it went crazy and smashed up the whole house and did something to the climate control system in my 133+ hi tech bedroom which is a bit of a shame really. i am sitting in the dark and there are like sparks and stuff coming down from the ceiling like in dues ex and the if and i don't know what is going to happen when dad comes home so thanks very much the person who said i should get an aibo you are the one who is a llama and you suck. oh well l8er!

drclaw@pcpowerplay.com.au

COMING SOON

March

Army Men RTS (Take 2 Interactive)
 4 Wheel Thunder (Take 2 Interactive)
 Casino (Take 2 Interactive)
 Conesal (Read Ant)
 Global Operations (Electronic Arts)
 Heroes of Might & Magic IV (Take 2 Interactive)
 Legend Double Pack 1&2 (Take 2 Interactive)
 Legends of Might & Magic IX (Take 2 Interactive)
 M4 Armoured Crash (GameNation)
 Reality DeathMatch (Red Ant)
 Serious Sam: Gold Pack (Take 2 Interactive)
 Starmageddon (Red Ant)
 Star Trek Bridge Commander (Activision)
 Star Wars Jedi Knight 2: Jedi Outcast (Activision)
 The Sims: Vacation (Electronic Arts)
 Tiger USA Tour 2002 (Electronic Arts)
 War Commander (Red Ant)
 Warrior Kings (Red Ant)

April

Age of Wonders 2 (Take 2 Interactive)
 Airlines 2 (Take 2 Interactive)
 Cold Zero: The Last Stand (Red Ant)
 Far West (Red Ant)
 FIFA 2002 World Cup (Electronic Arts)
 GTA 3 (Take 2 Interactive)
 Hotel Tycoon 2 (Red Ant)
 Iron Storm (Take 2 Interactive)
 Master of Orion 3 (GameNation)
 Natural Resistance (Red Ant)

May

F1 2002 (Electronic Arts)
 Freedom Force (Electronic Arts)
 Geoff Crammond's Grand Prix ver. 4 (GameNation)
 Unreal 2 (GameNation)
 Mafia: City of Lost Heaven (Take 2 Interactive)

inform

The Official Australian
Games Chart

Compiled by Inform in association with AVSDA

W/E 3 March 2002

TOP
20Best Selling Full Price
PC Games (over \$30)

1	★	C & C Renegade	Strategy
2	▼	Medal Of Honor Allied Asslt	Action
3	▼	The Sims Hot Date	Strategy
4	▼	The Sims	Strategy
5	▼	Harry Potter & Philosopher	Adventure
6	◆	Civilization 3	Strategy
7	◆	Return To Cattle Wolfenstein	Action
8	▲	Sid Meier's Sim Golf	Sports
9	▼	Empire Earth	Strategy
10	▼	The Sims Collectors Edition	Strategy
11	▼	Diablo II: Lord Of Dstrction	RPG
12	▲	Diablo II	RPG
13	★	Half Life Counter Strike	Action
14	▼	The Sims Livin' Large	Strategy
15	▼	The Sims House Party	Strategy
16	★	Half Life Ptm Edition	Action
17	▼	Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon	Strategy
18	◆	Age Of Empires 2	Strategy
19	▼	Sim City 3000 Unlimited	Strategy
20	▼	Cossacks: The Art of War	Strategy

★ New Entry ◆ Non Mover ▲ Up from last week ▼ Down from last week

Charts can be viewed at
www.informbd.com.au as part of

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Cool as Ice comp.

A powerful PC needs a powerful cooler and this month we have 2 new TermaTake products to give away, the Volcano 7 CPU cooler and Crystal Orb GPU cooler. To win what we need you to do is hearken back to the halcyon days of the late 80s and early 90s and tell us 5 ways in which Rap sensation Vanilla Ice was the coolest white man ever. It's as simple as that.

Send your entries to:
 Cool as Ice
 C/- PC PowerPlay
 78 Renwick St
 Redfern NSW 2016



DVDA

Black Adder Goes Forth

The sordid tendrils of the Black Adder family continue to snake their way through British history, beginning the fourth season at the dawn of modern warfare in the trenches of World War One. Rowan Atkinson reprises his role, continuing the caustic tradition laid down in the landmark second season. The illiterate Baldrick is ever at his side, ever spouting cunning plans for his master to torture metaphors upon.

The year is 1917, and the Blackadder family dream of ascending to the throne has been put on the back burner while survival is a more pressing issue. The British military establishment, as portrayed conservatively by Stephen Fry, is using human wave tactics against German machine guns, in the hope that the sausage-gobbling krauts will choke on their own dead. In terms of survivability, this strategy is a

proven failure, and Captain Blackadder spends six half-hour episodes doing anything he can to keep from going over the top.

While keeping to the razor's edge of comedy, and the equally hilarious realm of authentic world events, Black Adder Goes Forth saw a rise in production values, with exterior shots including massed armies and unconvincing biplane dogfights. Better yet are the cameo appearances from the likes of Rik Mayall and Adrian Edmondson.

This is arguably the worst of the four seasons, but even bad Blackadder wipes the floor with most any other televisual entertainment. Again, an entire season fits on the disc. No extras to be seen, presumably to be saved for a disc holding all the special episodes that cropped up over the years. Our American brothers had the opportunity to buy the complete works of Blackadder in a single box set, but a piecemeal approach is perhaps just as fitting for series with as many lows as highs.



He's got no pants on Darling!



Absolutely Fabulous Series 2

Roadshow, PG



So begins the steady downward spiral of the Ab Fab legacy. Still passable, still palatable, and intermittently hilarious, but from here it's a straight line to the ebb of series 4. The trend toward pervasively depressing British drama infects the fringes of the second season, with the morbid limits of human mortality flying in the face of Eddie and Patsy's decadence. When faced with any problem, from death, to decrepitude, to North African barbarism, their policy is constant: Drink, fall over, and insult the help. High points include the dynamic duo attempting to make use of a "super-market." Extras are confined to an out-take reel of around 15 minutes, entitled "Absolutely Not." The cardinal flaw of dual layer DVD production creeps in as well - the layer transition takes place in the middle of someone talking. Very bad form. The DVD rollout of BBC comedy continues. It's only a matter of time until we get to the good stuff. Like The Fast Show. Anyone for a pint?

Amon Saga

Madman, M 15+



The big selling point for this sword & sorcery anime flick from '86 is the character designs - they were done by Yoshitaka Amano (Final Fantasy 9). He also did the cover art. While the legions of Amano fans will go weak at the knees at the very thought, more detached observers may notice that there is more to a major motion picture than character designs (and poster art). This full frame, fully animated adventure romp has only about half the cel count needed for fluid movement, and it shows its age in other ways, too. The colour scheme is composed of lurid 80s pastels, the action scenes fall flat, and the characters aren't particularly likeable. Amon Saga is certainly no Ninja Scroll, and it's not even a Lodoss War. But there are redeeming features, like the evil emperor's palace that sits atop a giant magical tortoise. And the zany slapstick action. And the androgynous character designs. Other than that, it's just B movie inanity.

Gasaraki

In this crazy, mixed up, post Sept 11 world of ours, all eyes are cast to central Asia, as we ponder the future of war, not to mention civilisation itself. With every Tom Dick and Akbar building weapons of mass destruction in the back shed, how can we ever be assured of peace again? What new magic bullet will keep us safe from Johnny Hun?

Why, giant robots, of course! The basic assumption of every anime show from Gundam to Gunbuster is that giant, humanoid robots are the inevitable evolutionary destination of all military science. Gasaraki brings this argument to the edge of tomorrow, portraying a near-future world where the first such experimental weapons are being deployed.

Their first sortie in the war-torn streets of Belgistan goes astoundingly well, with conventional armour no match for the towering, lumbering bipeds. To keep things interesting, the Tactical Armours, or T.A.s, are being fielded by two different shadowy organisations: The Gowa family conglomerate, and the mysterious Symbol group.


On the face of things, the Gowa family might be faulted for

permitting their favourite son and star Noh dancer Yushiro go off to war in one of these experimental battle suits. But it all works out for the best when he meets up with a mysterious green haired girl who's battling for the other team. Is she the same girl from his hallucinations? Who's pulling the strings at Symbol? Has anyone told Yushiro his haircut is profoundly effeminate?

The big question facing anime fans will be whether Gasaraki is superior to Evangelion, the de facto standard in Giant Robot excellence. The truth is, they're very different shows. Eva is more metaphorical, with broader philosophical issues padding out the fan service. Gasaraki owes more to Patlabor, and needs to be watched in sequence to make any sense at all. At eight discs, it's a big investment. If you can only afford to buy one anime series this year, get Cowboy Bebop instead.




Rock Star

Warner Bros, M 15+  2/5



► Marky Mark fulfils the ultimate fantasy of every testosterone-crazed bedroom rocker of the mid 1980s - to become lead singer in his favourite band. Steel Dragon, of course, does not and did not exist (unlike the post-modern emergence of Spinal Tap revival shows). So while Mark's snorting coke off the cleavage of under-aged groupies and losing touch with why he got into music in the first place, the film's producers pillage the vaults of real 80s rock for appropriate backing music. Some tracks, like "Once In A Lifetime," transcend the piece, and others, like "Let's Get Rocked," are flat-out anachronisms. But Rock Star holds together well, as a cautionary tale of what happens if you don't put enough thought into your video rental decisions. The disc has a decent swag of extras, like the obligatory, mystery-destroying commentary track. Did you know: that wasn't Marky Mark's real hair? It was the real Batmobile, though.

Rush Hour 2

Roadshow, M 15+  3/5



► Jackie Chan! Chris Tucker! Action - excitement! And more tasteless jokes than you can shake a stick at. The formula of mismatching Chan's comedy stylings with Tucker's limited martial prowess works surprisingly well, and the plot moves along so fast that there's no time to ponder the improbable sequence of events. Tasteless home cinema enthusiasts will spooze over the Dolby 5.1 EX sound, or if they prefer, the DTS ES 6.1 mix. That rear centre speaker is looking like a better investment every day! For a by-the-numbers exploitation movie, Rush Hour 2 comes with stacks of extra features. Full length commentary, Hong Kong travelogue with Jackie Chan, and two hidden trailers for Fellowship of the Ring. Deleted scenes with commentary, featurettes, and everybody's favourite: motion menus! You're sure to get your \$39.95 worth out of this one. Yes, forty bucks. Maybe a rental?



Score List



➔ More games mean more scores to keep an eye on. This month's inclusion of such stellar treats as Jedi Knight 2: Jedi Outcast is beginning to throw the whole score curve off. If we start getting more games of the same caliber you can expect to see a lot more highlights throughout the list. What does next month hold in store?

12 o'Clock High	#46	68%	Cultures	#56	81%	Grand Prix Legends	#52	95%	Mech Collection	#54	69%
1nsane	#56	87%	Daikatana	#52	64%	Grand Prix World	#49	83%	Mech Comm 4: Black Knight	#73	79%
Abomination:Nemesis Project	#44	81%	Dark Reign 2	#51	89%	Grand Theft Auto 2	#44	84%	Mechcommander 2	#64	84%
Age of Empires 2: Conquerors	#54	90%	Deep Fighter	#57	60%	Ground Control	#52	90%	Mechwarrior 4: Vengeance	#57	91%
Age of Sail 2	#60	70%	Deep Space 9: The Fallen	#62	84%	Gulf War: Op Desert Hammer	#45	55%	Mercedes Benz Truck Racing	#57	55%
Age of Wonders	#46	84%	Delta Force 2	#46	78%	Gunlok	#63	81%	Merchant Prince 2	#64	42%
Airfix: Dogfighter	#61	79%	Delta Force: Land Warrior	#58	75%	Gunman Chronicles	#57	80%	Messiah	#48	89%
Airport Inc.	#48	42%	Descent 3: Mercenaries	#47	65%	Gunship	#50	89%	Metal Fatigue	#53	76%
Akuma: Demonspawn	#47	50%	Desperados	#62	86%	Half-Life Blue Shift	#64	78%	Metal Gear Solid	#57	78%
Alice	#58	83%	Deus Ex	#51	98%	Half-Life: Counter-Strike	#55	91%	Microsoft Flight Simulator 2000	#44	84%
Alien Nations	#52	75%	Diablo 2	#53	89%	Half-Life: Opposing Force	#45	90%	Midtown Madness	#54	82%
All Star Tennis 2000	#54	62%	Diablo II: Lord of Destruction	#63	90%	Heavy Metal: FAKK 2	#54	80%	M & M: Day of the Destroyer	#49	55%
Allegiance	#50	81%	Dick Johnson V8 Challenge	#46	45%	Heist	#62	7%	Millennium Racer	#50	70%
Alone in the Dark 4	#63	69%	Dino Crisis	#53	68%	Heroes Chronicles:Final Chapter	#67	65%	Mission Humanity	#61	7%
Anachronox	#65	85%	Dirt Track Racing	#55	90%	Heroes Chronicles	#57	68%	Monopoly Tycoon	#67	75%
Anarchy Online	#68	86%	Dirt Track Racing: Sprint Cars	#59	87%	H&D: Fight For Freedom	#46	45%	The Moon Project	#63	87%
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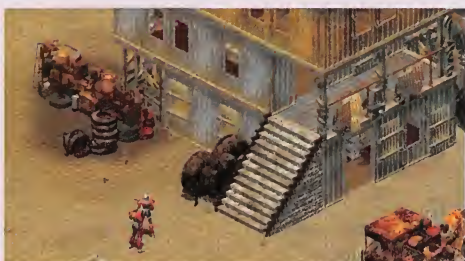


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"The environments and character designs are incredible..."

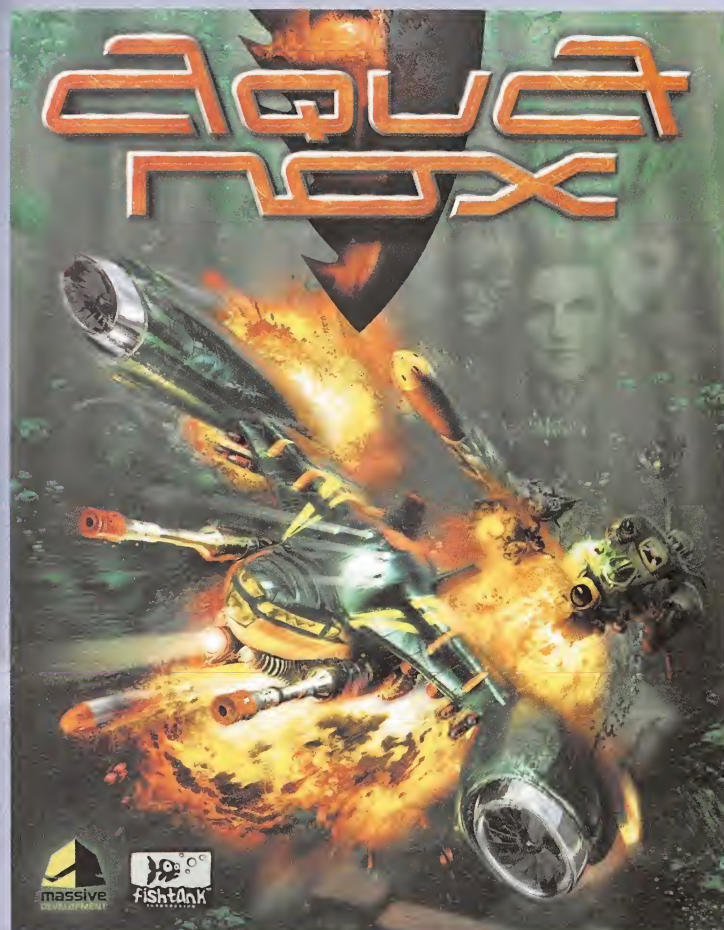
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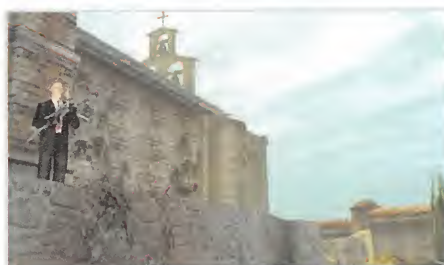
GAMES PC & XBOX

They gave us the code, we give you the lowdown

I told you I'd be back kiddies, bigger batter, faster (and more unshaven) than before. This month in previews we get sneaky - not as in the whole covert stealing things from distributors sense but sneaky is definitely the name of the game. For PC we have a look at the upcoming stealth oriented shooters, Hitman 2 and IGI (I'm Going In) 2. It became pretty obvious around the office that I became more than a little obsessed with Hitman 2 when I started sneaking up behind people, hitting them and trying to steal their clothes so I could infiltrate other magazines but what can you do, huh? As I write this I'm trying to do my best Anthony Fordham impersonation so later I may be able to convince the boss I'm the editor and give myself a pay rise and an all expenses paid trip to the destination of my choice. No luck as yet but I'll keep trying. The save function doesn't seem to effect real life so whenever I get found out I have to start at the beginning again instead of just reloading. Bummer.

Also with the unveiling of the new Xbox section we take a first look at the first Lord of the Rings game and even at this early stage of development it looks very impressive - great art, great animation and great plot. What more could you want in a console RPG? So read on my friends and enjoy what's in store. You can sleep sound in the knowledge that I will be bringing you the latest and greatest in gaming and for enough money you can contact the Agency and employ my services to assassinate your enemies. I think I may have to find a new and less antisocial obsession. What do you think?

Daniel Wilks
News Editor



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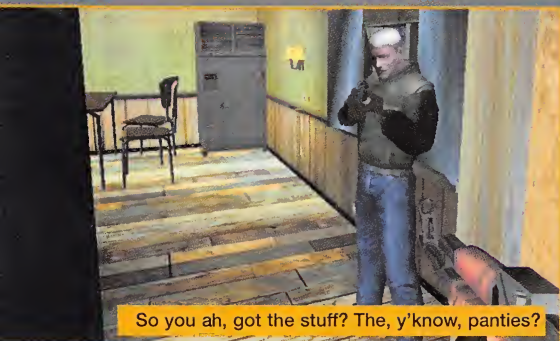




A 68cm Sony Trinitron TV this ain't...



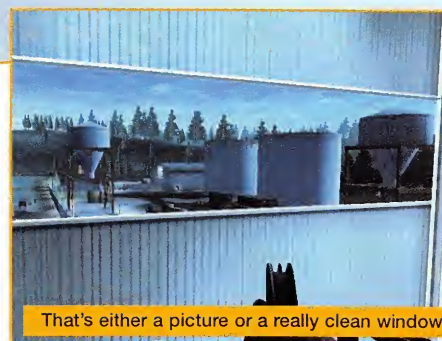
Project I.G.I. 2: Covert Strike



So you ah, got the stuff? The, y'know, panties?



Run Forests, run!



That's either a picture or a really clean window

Though saddled with a rather unwieldy and unfortunate name, Project I.G.I. (I'm Going In) turned out to be one of the sleeper hits of 2001. Working off a stealth over shooting basis, I.G.I. put the player in the (combat) boots of David Jones, former SAS soldier now working freelance for a mysterious organisation known as I.G.I. A series of missions saw David sneaking around various locales, killing and sabotaging to keep the world peaceful. A year on and David is set to come back in Project I.G.I. 2: Covert Strike, which promises not only to be a sequel but a complete retooling of the concept. As well as a serious update in the graphics engine, I.G.I. 2 will feature a new and improved AI, more missions than you can poke a stick at, some innovative level design and a truly revolutionary save feature.

One of the major gripe with the original game was the remarkably dumb enemy AI. More often than not you could snipe a soldier and the guy standing right next to him wouldn't even notice. At other times enemy soldiers

would charge at you only to begin shooting in a totally random direction or just stand around until they absorbed enough damage to fall over. Constant enemy respawning also meant that some areas were nigh impossible to pass. Well, these gripes are a thing of the past with the all-new and improved (all singing all dancing) AI will take care of all of these problems and add a new degree of complexity to the game. Enemies will now respond far more to stimuli and their environment meaning that they'll take notice of bullet holes, strange shadows, broken equipment or open doors. Enemies are now also capable of alerting each other of trouble and finding reinforcements. Bad guys will also operate within an Army rank hierarchy, with higher ranked soldiers capable of more complex strategies and gaining more obedience from their subordinates.

Each level also has only a limited number of enemies, as they no longer respawn. Whilst this does mean that you can conceivably kill everybody on the level it's definitely not a

recommended tactic for winning. Apart from the fact that killing everybody just makes everything that much more difficult you'd be lucky to find enough ammunition to get the job done. If there's any shooting to be done it's best to leave it to the end of a mission. Sneak your way in. Shoot your way out. Interestingly enough the new AI will also be implemented in vehicles, which will now react to how much damage they have sustained. Say a jeep is being driven towards you and you start to fire and damage the vehicle. The driver will know to either try to get the vehicle out of range or jump out before it explodes and pursue you on foot.

Probably the most interesting and revolutionary addition to I.G.I. 2 is the save feature. To keep the tense atmosphere and keep players on their toes saving is now a time-based event. Saving can take place anywhere on a level but it takes time to perform much like picking a lock or diffusing a bomb. What this means is that people will be able to save but they need to be stealthy about it. You could try



Now that is a truly stupid company name



Damnit, missed



I guess I should have cut the yellow wire



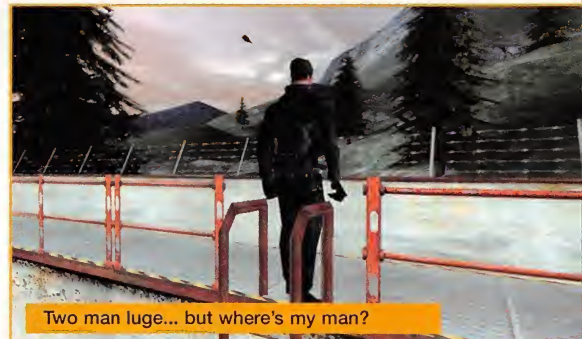
Serves them right for calling it "Baektex"



Hmn... truck... bomb... crazy man with gun...



Goddamn hi-tech security systems



Two man luge... but where's my man?

to save just before a big gun fight with a plethora of enemy units but the action will take around 5 seconds - more than enough time to get yourself shot six ways from Sunday. The feature will undoubtedly aggravate a number of players (who prefer a one button quick save) but will enforce the stealthy nature of the game.

I.G.I. 2: Covert Strike will take place over 20 missions and will feature 20 weapons and 10 gadgets to play with. Missions range from relatively simple fare like sneaking into a facility to shut down security systems to more difficult infiltration and sabotage missions. Whilst some of these levels are rather straight forward in design - basic landscape, sneaking and a building - some of the later levels are rather interesting in scope. One mission later in the game has David operating as a door gunner for a helicopter gunship, blowing away everything in sight to prepare for a lightning strike on a mountain base. After the initial helicopter part of the mission you must infiltrate the base on foot into the base to steal some papers. Any troops

you didn't gun down from your airborne death machine will come after you with a vengeance so it definitely pays to be thorough. Nice little touches like this appear all through the game offering some welcome change from having to be stealthy all of the time. Much like in the first game FMV cut scenes will bookend the various missions and let you know the objective.

At this stage of development the new I.G.I. 2 graphics engine shows marked improvement over its predecessor with excellent new bones and skins. Soldiers now run and jump realistically. They even lay down realistic looking suppressing fire when retreating. Improved textures and dynamic lighting effects also add to the feel of the game. Whereas the first game took place mostly in outdoor environments, I.G.I. 2 has landscapes ranging from snow covered mountain peaks to dust swept Libyan villages and all look equally tasty.

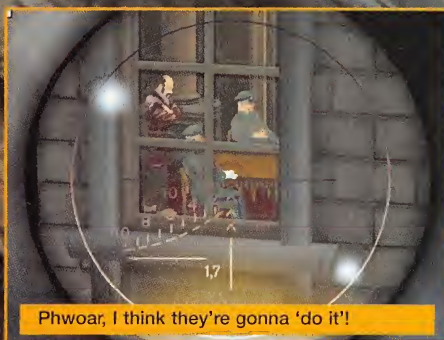
The final addition to I.G.I. 2 that's bound to keep the punters happy is a fully implemented team based multi-player mode. Though it looks

Developer:	Innerloop
Publisher:	Codemasters
Distributor:	TBA
Due:	May 2002

primarily like Counter-Strike and its ilk, I.G.I. 2 multiplayer will expand on the formula by having multiple missions in each round. Instead of just rescuing the hostage player may need to rescue them and escort them to a computer so they can download files that in turn need to be ferried somewhere else. Some features of the singleplayer game will also be included in the multiplayer but as yet there has been no word as to what they will be.

The original Project I.G.I. was an interesting and fun game plagued with some problems that made it very frustrating. If I.G.I. 2 final code looks as good as the preview it may just be one of the must-haves of 2002.

Daniel Wilks



Phwoar, I think they're gonna 'do it'!



Must... not... give in... to... bad... tiles...



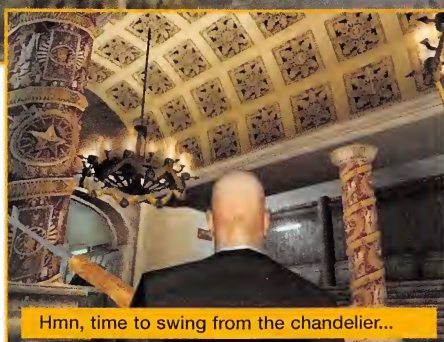
Up close and personal, my favourite

Developer:	IO Interactive
Publisher:	Eidos
Distributor:	TBA
Due:	2nd Quarter 2002

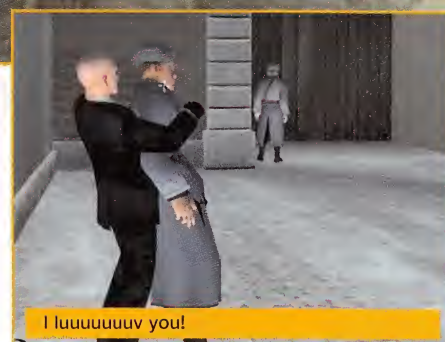
Hitman 2



Well I took a left but hey, no bus station



Hmn, time to swing from the chandelier...



I luuuuuuuuv you!

It's been a while but soon everybody's favourite big bald sociopath, 47 will be gracing the PC again in a new round of sneaking, killing and otherwise acting all unsavory. Like the first Hitman game, Hitman 2 casts the player as the mysterious and partially amnesiac Codename: 47, an assassin working for the equally mysterious Agency. After the events of the first game, 47 has left the world at large to take refuge in a monastery, doing nothing more than trying to relax and forget what little he knows. Of course fate, fickle mistress that she is, sticks her grubby little hands in where they aren't wanted and draws our titular Hitman back into the world of covert agencies, conspiracies and killing people for money. No real details have been released as yet as to why the Hitman is called back into action apart from one word, which speaks volumes by itself. Treason.

IO have had a good deal of correspondence with the gaming public when

it comes to the features that have been added to this sequel. In direct response to player feedback, IO have added a slew of new feature to Hitman 2 with the aim of making it more accessible and fun to play. These new features include the ability to switch between 1st and 3rd person perspective, saving anywhere on the level, an expanded inventory and you can carry weapons from mission to mission rather than having to buy them again and again. Though some fans of the original game may rally against such changes to gameplay (especially saving) they should succeed in making the game far more accessibility to the average gamer. Due to the fact that the game will also be released on PS2, all controls will be made much easier. Most basic actions can now be performed with a simple "USE" key (much like Deus Ex) further streamlining play.

Each mission, with locations ranging from a Sicilian Monastery to St. Petersburg or a

Feudal Japanese castle contain a dynamic mission AI meaning that every time you try a mission the aim may be different. You may be given a different person to kill, so one time it may be the bald general and the next it may be the alcoholic left-handed general. The AI will add a good deal of replay value to Hitman 2 as well as a great amount of complexity. The AI also means that it's nearly entirely up to the player how they want to complete the mission - they could opt to snipe from a roof, looking through their scope until the target becomes apparent or opt for a more personal, stealth based approach.

The final addition to Hitman 2 is a new graphics engine which looks fantastic. As the screens can attest all of the current environments are rendered beautifully. It shouldn't be too long now until all of us with a jones for sneaking and interactive wet-work can get our next fix as the game is due 2nd quarter this year.

Performance Cooled By Thermaltake

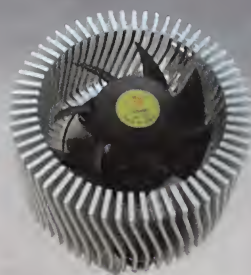
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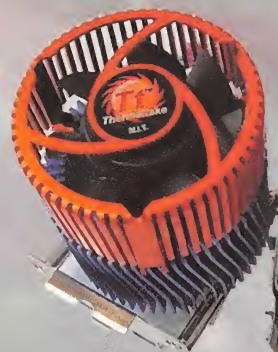
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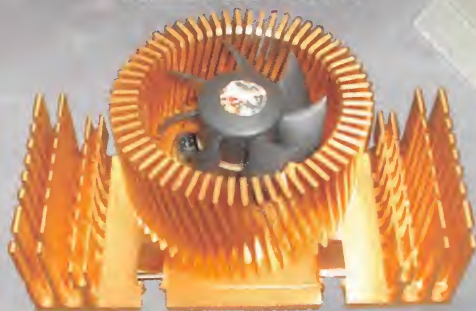
VOLCANO 7



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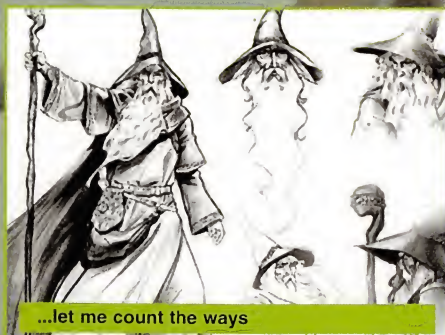
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Sweet Gandalf, how I love thee...



...let me count the ways



The artists can't draw faces, you see

Developer:	WXP Inc.
Publisher:	Universal Interactive
Distributor:	TBA
Due:	October 2002

Lord Of The Rings



Now you're purty...



You're not so purty...



And you're homely as a mule's butt

The game's official site may be a bit presumptuous calling Lord of the Rings the greatest story ever written but any gamer that's not even the least bit interested in the first game based on the movie is either fooling themselves or only owns a 386 and an Atari Lynx. Initially being developed for the Xbox, Lord of the Rings: Fellowship of the Ring will allow players to control Frodo, Aragorn and Gandalf through the eight different Middle-Earth realms solving puzzles completing quests and getting snarled in combat. Throughout their travels the fellowship will encounter friend and foe alike who will either aid them or try to stop their quest to destroy the one ring.

The plot of the game will faithfully follow the events of the book whilst adding some new elements to the mix such as side quests and other such RPG style flourishes. Its not really known as yet what format these extra elements will be but they should add a great deal to the flavour of the game without

detracting from the main story arc or aggravating the purists. The game will progress through 8 areas, each with around 3 sub levels to make 24 in all so players will have the opportunity to explore the Mines of Moria, Rivendell and a number of other locations. Though plot development is going to be fairly linear, players will be able to travel freely throughout the different levels interacting with NPCs or simply hunting and killing monsters. Performing certain tasks or interacting with specific individuals will trigger progression between levels.

Though the levels are very large players shouldn't have to worry about excessively long load times due to the fact that the game will constantly stream data off the DVD. In fact, the only time the game should have any type of load time is during the animated cut-scenes. Since events will directly reflect the book players can expect to meet characters left out of the movie including Tom Bombadil and Glorfindel.

Many fans of the book were very upset that both characters were left out of the movie so extra care has been taken to include them in the game.

At the moment the game looks absolutely delightful with detail taken directly from the book for added realism. Look down and you'll see Frodo's hairy feet - likewise Aragorn looks scruffy and unkempt, not at all like a king and Gandalf is resplendent in his travelling robes. Even at this stage of the build the frame rate is very good leading to some nice smooth animation and especially good death animations. The demo showcased the Old Forest and it is truly a thing of beauty, filled with soft light, gently falling leaves and not so gentle giant spiders.

Though Lord of the Rings: Fellowship of the Ring is still some way off we can look forward to it being the first game based on the books to be worth the wait. LOTR is due out this October.

Master Rallye

Master Rallye is a rally racing game based on the trans-European and Asian endurance race of the same name.

In keeping with the race itself, the game offers extremely wide driving areas, rather than the narrow, constrained race "tracks" of all other Rally games. A massive range of fully licensed vehicles, including: Cherokee Jeep, Isuzu Trooper, Chevrolet Blazer, Mitsubishi Shogun, Mercedes M Class (4 models including AMG), Nissan (5 models), and more!

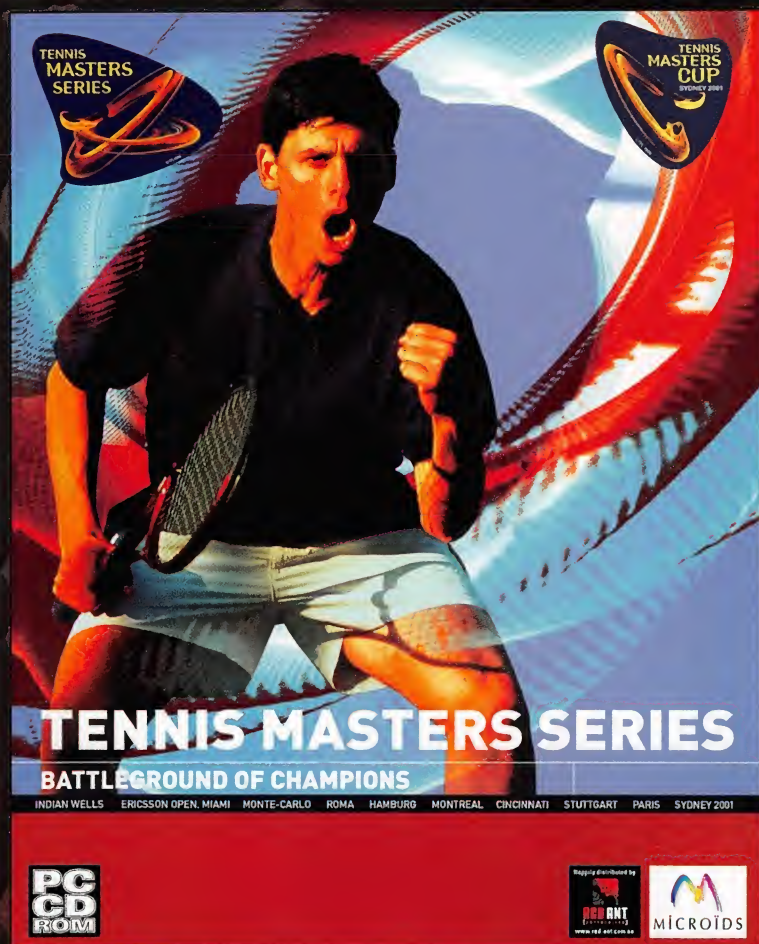
Release Date:
February 2002 (PC CD-ROM)
June 2002 (PlayStation® 2)



Experience the atmosphere of the most prestigious tournaments through the championship TENNIS MASTERS SERIES. From INDIAN WELLS to PARIS: including the prestigious ERICSSON OPEN MIAMI, MONTE-CARLO, ROMA, HAMBURG, MONTREAL, CINCINNATI, STUTTGART.

Win sets and score victories over your opponents to qualify for the ultimate test and become the World's best player in the ultimate encounter: The Tennis Masters Cup Sydney. Never forget: It's not the competing that matters - It's the winning.

Release Date:
February 2002 (PC CD-ROM)
June 2002 (PlayStation® 2)

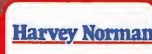


Tennis Masters Series

Developed and published by:

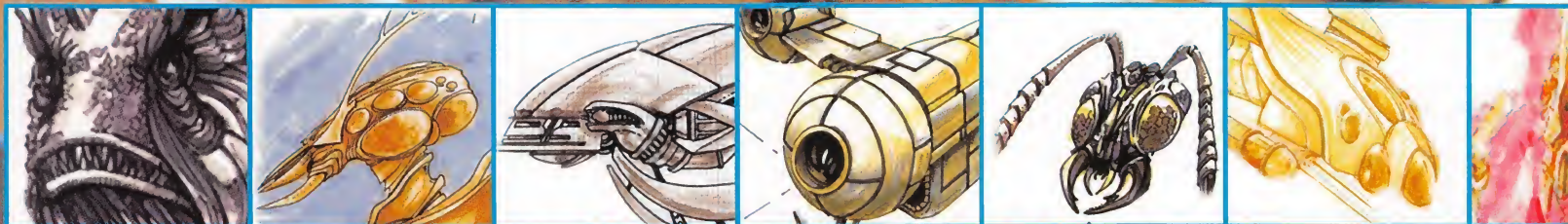


Available from the following retailers:

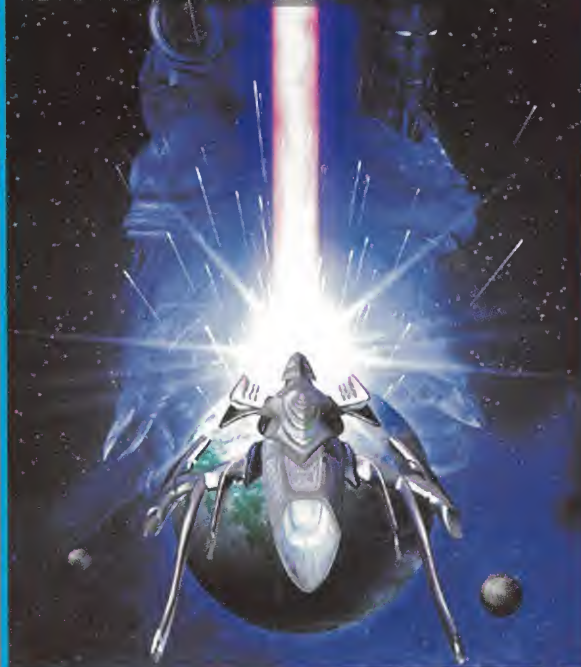


MASTER OF ORION

When you're talking galactic conquest there are few better training routines than watching the Star Wars movies over and over, reading the Evil Overlord list and playing endless Master of Orion games. Timothy C. Best talks to the team behind the latest, and possibly greatest, galactic domination learning aid.



NO PLAN SURVIVES FIRST CONTACT WITH THE ENEMY



MASTER OF ORION II

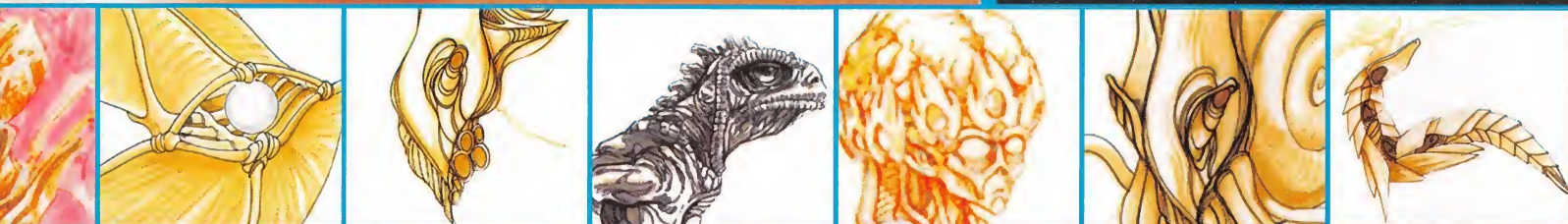
AN INFOGRAVES / QUICKSILVER SOFTWARE INC. PRODUCTION MASTER of ORION II™ A GAME FOR PC and MACINTOSH COMPUTER
 Creative: **Kurtz** - Producer for Infogrames, **B. M. Lally** - Executive Producer for Infogrames
B. M. Fisher - Executive Producer for Quicksilver, **Cory Nelson** - Producer for Quicksilver, **Alan Emrich**, **G. Sam Hughes** - Creative Design
Greg Mortenson - Lead Programmer, **Heath Rowley** - Art Director
 WITH APPEARANCES BY: Russ Worthy, Scott Godfrey, Chung He Khan, Irene Macabarte, Floyd Grubbs, Rob Harris, Stephen Roney
 Tim Hume, Nate Gross, Kevin Oll, Jason Taylor, Danielle Roder, Ryan Greene
 THIS GAME™ HASN'T YET BEEN RATED

Running a space empire should be like

putting together a model plane. You know, you get each little, numbered, piece and put it in place, hand-glue every seam and apply the decal stickers just so ... because, really, a sci-fi civilisation is something that you should be able to assemble nicely and neatly, join by join. How big and complicated could it be ... really? Let MoO3 open your eyes.

Quicksilver Studios has crammed in detail after detail in screen after screen of options. If you shake out all the contents of this box you'll have a pile of numbered pieces waist high. Every aspect of running the empire can be controlled down to the minutest tweak. Maybe you want to shift the tax burden off the middle class and onto the moral intelligentsia or social elite because they whine too much about your approval of chemical weapons for casual conflicts.

Perhaps you wish to formulate extensive pre-battle plans for your next great engagement; maybe you just want to fake extensive battle plans ... you never know who's watching.





▶ You can change your ciphers for diplomacy, science and military endeavours. You can even float or fix your currency against the galactic standard AUs and/or artificially inflate or deflate your dollar as well as dozens of normal diplomacy and trade moves. If all of this sounds daunting, it should be. There's just too much there for any one person to handle. Running an empire is like that. One of the mottos most banded around the MoO3 development studios is: "players can do anything, they can't do everything." Playing MOO3 is going to be different from playing most games. It's like being the Captain on a massive vessel like something out of Star Trek. Without the Captain everything still happens. Navigation can move the ship around, a bunch of people in engineering keep things working and communications keep alien empires from opening fire as you cruise too close to their planets. In fact, without the Captain things always run more smoothly. It's the Captain who decides to visit the ancient ruins. It's the Captain who tells the crew to alter course to pick up the alien life pod with flashing warning beacon. That's what playing MoO3 will be like. Without direct interference your empire will click along nicely. Technology-skewed races will happily develop useful gadgets, expansionist races will crawl out among the stars and traders will form deals with other races around them. As the leader you push the race to take risks and seize tactical advantage. You don't have to play to keep things running, you play to win.

Leader-ship

The smooth running of the starship Enterprise relies on all of

the Sulus, Uhuras, McCoys, Datas and, nowadays, busty Vulcan babes. These are the people who support the Captain and make a lot of day-to-day decisions. In MOO3 that's what your leaders are for. You have heads of Government, Military, Finance, Security, Science and Foreign affairs and under each of them you have heads for each sub-department ... right down to individual war group leaders for every task force you have in your fleet. That's dozens of characters. Each leader has an agenda (which can include being corrupt or an enemy mole); has stats for ambition, ability, clout and luck; major spheres of influence; as well as a set of personal biases. It's always bad when your head of security has 10 ability, a daring style, is cagey, underhanded and evil as well as boasting influence with the illuminati and being anti-species. I've seen characters like this - who gives ex-TV executives leading roles in government is beyond me - all I know is that it can't bode well for your empire. Without your influence to keep these leaders in check, they will go about their business based on their nature. When I talked to the lads at Quicksilver, designer Alan Emrich described what was happening with the leaders the best: "In Master of Orion III the bureaucracy makes decisions that reflect a combination of your policies and their will. The masses, for their part, can foment unrest that leads to revolts and even revolution. This means that players not only have to defeat enemies but do it in a way that appeals to the people. If you're leading a civilisation of technophile peaceniks down the path of insult diplomacy and

straight into a multi-enemy war... well, let's just say you can expect a 'tough sell' internally with that plan," Emrich adds with a smile. The flow isn't totally one way, however. If a particular leader is giving you the screaming heebies you can place the imperial eye on him or her, so that every move is watched. You can also initiate an empire-wide push to remove leaders who are too ambitious, corrupt or of low ability. The success of these

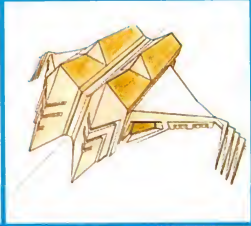
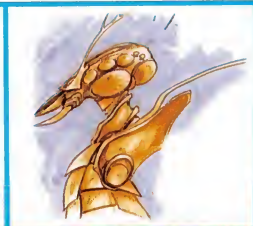
moves depend on the clout of the targeted leader, how heavily you put your foot down (from "Hope" to "Or else!") and how many Imperial Focus Points you want to spend for emphasis.

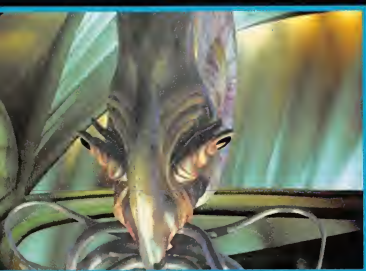
Focus, Imperial Focus that is Imperial Focus Points are neat. If you are the spirit of your empire, then IFP are the points you spend to manifest. If you are the Kirk of the Enterprise, IFP are the amount of energy you have to spend



HOW TIME FLIES

A friend of mine was introducing a new player to the fold of MOO2, a player who had a job interview at noon the next day. He went out and came back and the newbie was still playing. The greenhorn suggested a multi-player game. My friend warned him that the game was evil. The newbie scoffed. He was wearing the smile on the other side of his face the next day when he realised that he had to go to his interview after 19 straight hours of MOO2. Luckily, MOO3 comes with a timer you can set to go off every 5 minutes, half an hour, hour, or whatever, as well as a built-in alarm you can set to go off 8-hours-worth-of-sleep before an interview. Nice.





MASTER OF ORION

arguing with Spock and Bones. Every decision you make, every time you actively step in, you burn IFP. It might be a very small amount, like if you want to move some ships around: one point will let you move as many as you want. On the other hand, if you really want to change your evil empire's policy on slavery you might be looking at burning all of your points (and then some) to make it stick.

If you spend more points than your allotment (IFP points are determined by tech, government type, racial leanings etc) then Emrich says the game will start laying on "bad karma". Too much pushing equals pushing your luck. There are two reasons Quicksilver has decided to go down this path. One is a lesson learnt from MOO2 and the other is making the empire come to life. In MOO2 people had a lot of fun in the middle of the game ... after

the slow start up (involving lots of hitting the turn button and little else) but before the closing parts of the game you had 30-odd worlds to micromanage, setting endless build queues and manually moving and gathering dozens of ships together from dozens of producing worlds. In short, Quicksilver is trying to bypass the boring bits while letting people take as much control of any particular aspects of the game they choose.

The second element is all about the experience of running a space empire. There is more to worry about than just building warships when you are the head honcho of a nation of Klingon wannabes. Your people have a mind of their own; your job is to manage and guide them. Then there are all of the pesky leaders who plot and scheme. The world is alive - push and it pushes back.

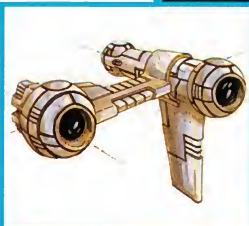
RUNNING AN EMPIRE EVIL-STYLE

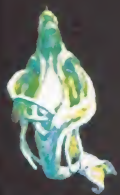
Why does good always triumph over evil? Is it because of some basic law of the universe or it is blatant stupidity on the part of the guys in the black hats?

Peter Anspach thinks it's the latter. He's assembled one of the definitive lists of dos and don'ts for aspiring diabolical tyrants at www.eviloverylord.com

Here are some of the words of wisdom from his "The Top 100 Things I'd Do If I Ever Became An Evil Overlord" list:

- 1 My Legions of Terror will have helmets with clear plexiglass visors, not face concealing ones.
- 2 My ventilation ducts will be too small to crawl through.
- 3 When I've captured my adversary and he says, "Look, before you kill me, will you at least tell me what this is all about?" I'll say, "No." and shoot him. No, on second thought I'll shoot him then say "No."
- 12 One of my advisors will be an average five-year-old child. Any flaws in my plan that he is able to spot will be corrected before implementation.
- 29 I will dress in bright and cheery colours, and so throw my enemies into confusion.
- 30 All bumbling conjurers, clumsy squires, no-talent bards, and cowardly thieves in the land will be pre-emptively put to death. My foes will surely give up and abandon their quest if they have no source of comic relief.
- 34 I will not turn into a snake. It never helps.





Balancing Act

From reading everything there is to read, talking to the developers and playing the incomplete demo, the most striking thing about the game is the subtlety of MOO3.

You want to somehow help players manager their huge empires instead of just having colony leaders you can turn on? Then build them into the core of the game and have them around from the beginning so you can have a living world.

You want to somehow provide balance for players who want to bide their time and dwell in a few small worlds instead of sprawl all over the stars? You want to be able to replicate countries like Japan, Germany and Hollywood, who have historically held sway way out of proportion with their geographical size? Bring in IFP and "the Heavy Foot of Government".

IFP allow smaller players tighter control (more points to spend per planet) while the heavy foot of government represents the drag of a huge and ancient bureaucracy (think the final days of the Roman Empire).

Emrich gives the example of a new ship costing 200AUs in a "newly minted" society while the

same ship cost 375 in the old empire with greater, but more dispersed, resources. (Naturally, in this example, the new empire can sell the ships to the old empire and both can win). There are a lot of examples of fine little balancing acts like these that just slide into game, things that you're not likely to notice until you have played many, many a game.

Under the Hood

With so much going on and the subtle ways that MoO3 handles the bigger issues there is a chance that players will get lost in all the space or loose sight of the effects they are wreaking on their people.

"This was a concern of ours as well. We certainly don't want the computer to have all the fun," says Quicksilver president Bill Fisher. Emrich continues, "The basic mechanic is that you spend each turn taking care of those matters that you feel are important, and then whatever is left over the AI (simulating all the Leaders of your civilisation, as well as the masses) takes care of the rest. How light or heavy a hand you use in managing things is reflected in your

Imperial Focus Points."

For players who like to look under the hood, checking stats and seeing what decisions are on the drawing board costs no IFP. You can keep tabs on everything if that is your want. Emrich likens this to layers of an onion that can be peeled back and explored.

A huge Encyclopaedia Galactica is also being added to give inquisitive players info on the workings of the game universe and what everything does.

All of this is not mere vanity. MOO3 just encompasses so many layers and varieties of gameplay. Way back to the original Master of Orion, espionage has always been my game (too many Bond movies while growing up). MOO3 has enough espionage elements to keep me happy without having to stray into economics, trade or Orion senate politics. You can set up spy rings, train agents with special abilities, target different areas of an empire (like stir up dissatisfaction in literary circles or bombing areas of vice), steal plans for the latest zap-a-tron, take the baddies' new DeathHawk out for a spin, try converting enemy leaders into moles, issue disinformation to sucker opponents into attacks or to scare larger opponents out of attacks and so much more.

Each element of the game threatens this level of depth. Thank goodness for the leaders. Now players can be a spymaster without worrying about being a quartermaster. Maybe when I'm done spying it'll be time for Machiavelli-action: destroying foes by getting their best equipment and racial focus banned in the Senate. Maybe I'll take five to control some key battles. Play the game you want; just don't try do everything. It

wasn't good for Napoleon, it won't be good for you.

Are You eXperienced?

When Alan Emrich was talking to the designer of the first two Orion games they both settled on one key element for improvement: giving each race a unique feel and personality. No longer would people be in control of a bunch of statistics, they would be in control of an empire of demandingly colourful characters.

Space expansion games are usually classified as being 4X games (eXplore, eXpand, eXploit and eXterminate) but the creators of MoO3 are aiming at adding an extra "X": eXperience. What this means is a unified approach to the game.

Everything should have a place and everything should go towards not only making something that is fun to play but also feels like a living space.

Art director Rantz Hoseley: "One of the first things that we really wanted to achieve in MOO3 was that sense that you are participating in an epic space saga. To give the player those cornerstones and key elements so that as they are making decisions and committing actions, that they feel as if they are really shaping the course and history of this living, breathing universe."

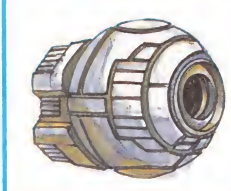
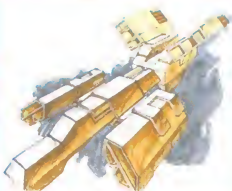
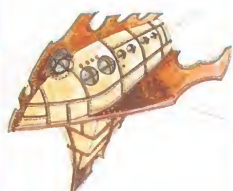
I know that in this preview I haven't talked about the intricate ship design, the hundreds of tech options or even the epic scale, space-opera paced real-time space combat, or many, of the many, many components that make MOO3 tick. That's because the game isn't about all the elements, it's about how it fits together.

When I asked designer Emrich to explain how things are integrated

ALAN EMRICH, WHAT WOULD HE KNOW?

Alan Emrich is the lead designer on MOO3. On a game of this scale clever design can make all the difference. Emrich, luckily, has a lot of credibility (obsession?) with strategy games in general and Master of Orion in particular. He wrote the bulk of the first MOO's strategy guide.

He also gets to say things like: "For those of you who don't know, I coined the phrase '4X' (meaning eXplore, eXpand, eXploit, and eXterminate) for these kinds of games years ago when I was Computer Gaming World magazine's first Strategy Games Editor. I'd heard it from Tom Hughes, and old gaming buddy of mine and a fellow designer on MOO3. To my chagrin, the term was added to the hobby lexicon. Now I'm trying to push the frontiers of the genre a bit by adding a 5th X, in this case meaning 'eXperience.'"





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he had a little trouble: "Wow... you might as well ask me to describe the taste of a cake or what a colour looks like." After a pause he did give it a try, "Everything is pretty tightly woven in Master of Orion 3. When you make a decision, its repercussions can ripple throughout that civilisation." Emrich and the team have set out to make a game with no right answers, just lots of options. Life has a nasty way of getting in the way of the best-laid plans. "There is no 'perfect path' to Black Hole Generators," he explains as an example. "Even when you've lined up the right technologies, there's still the development stage of a project to be suffered through. And the events in the game are very numerous - now, they are

mostly minor occurrences often affecting only a single civilisation, but there's the odd cataclysmic event in the mix that will cause everyone to sit up and take notice. When you add those elements with the increased variables found in domestic politics and foreign affairs, players will not be as likely to start a game with a 'perfect plan,' but be more inclined to try a 'new strategy this time' instead." If all of its depth and interwoven elements come together as they should - and the signs are good - MOO3 will redefine the 4X strategy game experience and push the bar up into the stars. Hopefully, the fate of Orion will be in our hands in the not too distant future.

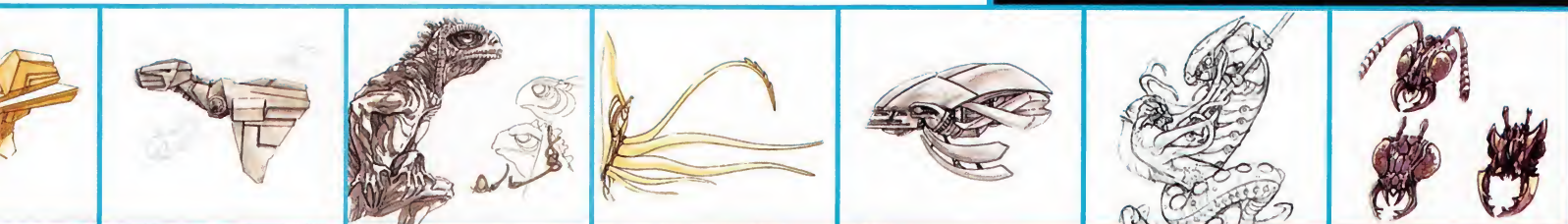
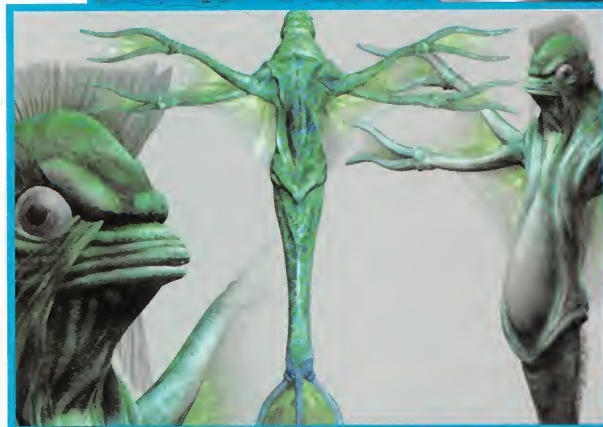
WHAT ARE YOU DOING DAVE?

MOO3's magic will pivot on the AI's ability to intelligently run not only the non-player empires but the player's empire as well.

I know that, you know that, Quicksilver know that. The AI has been in the works from day one so that it will look at using all of the game's elements together to find a solution. If a planet's population is starving the leader will carefully run through options, from dedicating more areas to farms to trading on the open market to starting research into new food technology.

Quicksilver president Bill Fisher: "I've worked very closely on the AI for our previous games, and am also watching over the AI work on MOO3 in the same way. What I'm seeing is that there's a huge amount of detail in the way it makes its decisions. They usually look very smart, and it's not just because they're guessing and getting lucky. I know that level of cleverness is spread all over the code, because we spent a lot of time designing a framework that understands how to make 'surprising' choices. I fully expect to see the same kinds of emails we got on Conquest of the New World, in which players would ask how the AI knew to sneak up behind them. If anything, I expect those sorts of "aha" moments a lot more in this game because there's so much more that's not random but in fact is coldly calculated for effectiveness."

A coldly calculating AI sounds great for the game, but I don't know how well it bodes for the world...



Freelancer

Jorg C Neumann explains how Elite fans will finally get a new game for a new age

Developer: Digital Anvil

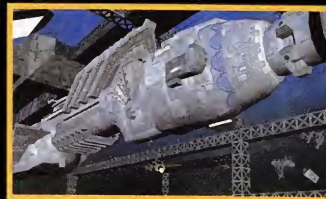
Due: Q3 2002



Freelancer is a lot younger than Duke Nukem Forever but it seems to be about the same age - a game that's perpetually in development, plagued by resignations and departmental restructuring.

Fortunately it seems that Freelancer is at last on track for a release later this year, and rests in the capable Teutonic hands of Jorg C Neumann. We spoke in Vegas in front of a chunky machine running a build of Freelancer than more than adequately showed off the enormous promise in this space trading/combat game.

Basically what Freelancer is all about is freedom. Jorg showed me a sequence where we flew out of hyperspace into a massive battle between pirates and a police battleship. We were free to join either side in the battle, and once we won, the game would automatically shift into a debriefing script where various other events would unfold because we assisted in that mission.



It's like Elite except your 'random' acts will have more complex consequences - keep helping the pirates and you can land on secret bases and even use an alternative hyperspace transport route! But look out, because the cops will have it in for you.

We'll take a closer and more detailed look at Freelancer before its release later this year.

For Microsoft to call the

recent event in Vegas the International Games Festival was more than a little cheeky since the only games on display were Microsoft games. It was a little like the way the US calls its national baseball competition the World Series, and proclaims the eventual winner the World Champion. The International Games Festival was the same in

the sense that even though all the developers were Microsoft developers, some of them had foreign accents, so I suppose it was International.

The Sony XBOX

On the taxi ride in from the airport to the famous Strip, I was surprised to discover that the driver had never heard of XBOX, although he did assure me he

would check it out with 'the kid' when he got home. The driver was likewise surprised to learn that I had come all the way from Or-strayla (as he put it) for a one day event. I shrugged and remarked to the effect that since Microsoft was putting myself and my esteemed colleagues of the international gaming press up in one of the most expensive hotels in Vegas - the Bellagio - I wasn't

about to start complaining.

The Bellagio, for those handful of readers who haven't managed to spend a night or two there on their whirlwind global tours of greed and debauchery, is roughly the size of central Sydney. They have a swimming complex that includes a pool where you can do 25 metre laps cross-wise. There's also a free monorail system that connects Bellagio to



Combat Flight Simulator 3

It's not just a dry old simulator for Anorak-wearing enthusiasts anymore...

Developer: Microsoft

Due: Q3 2002



If you can only say one thing about the developers of CFS3 it's that they're dedicated to the point of insanity. These guys travel the world looking for tiny details about obsolete machinery and then lovingly model them into their game. And CFS3 is at last a game, combining the exemplary flight model of the CFS franchise with a stat management system that should make the experience of flying in the European Theatre of WW2 much more immersive.

Three stats have been created to track the development of pilots - vision, G-tolerance, and leadership. Vision affects how soon the little dots in the distance will turn into recognisable planes, and leadership affects how quickly AI pilots will respond to commands. G-tolerance addresses an area of unrealism in flight sims, which was the pilot's magical ability to pull 5g after 5g turn with no ill-effects. A 'bucket' of G tolerance is



slowly emptied after each extreme act of aerobatics, until even a little 2g pull will result in a blackout.

Combined with a completely new graphics engine (and sweet is not the word here people) these new features should ensure CFS3 gets played by more than the usual collection of Anorak-wearing WW2 flight sim nuts. Stay tuned for a bigger preview soon.



the slightly less ornately overblown Monte Carlo where, according to an anaemic bit of white-trash with some ability in sleight-of-hand who came on the monorail tourist information system three times during the four minute trip, everything has a touch of magic. The Bellagio also contains the allegedly world famous Botanical Gardens (yes, Botanical, not the rather more

usual Botanic) which on inspection turned out to be a ghastly three-quarter acre flower arrangement - thousands upon thousands of cut daffodils, gardenias and a dozen other varieties having been trucked in from the other side of the enormous desert that surrounds both the Bellagio and grand old lady Vegas herself. Truly a low point in the human story.

Mucus

Unfortunately, on arrival I was socked heavily by the cold that had circulated throughout the Qantas 747-400's air conditioning system for 12 hours on the flight over, and so I was therefore unable to attend the extravagant welcome party Microsoft threw in Vegas' apparently exclusive Ghost Bar. I staggered into my plush Bellagio hotel room, drank

all the water in the minibar and passed out, but by early the next morning I had heard various tall tales about the party, not the least of which included a report saying a prominent lead developer had pulled up to the front door of a neighbouring hotel in a limo, flung open the door to reveal himself and a bevy of Vegas beauties, screamed "Quick get in!" to the nearest



Impossible Creatures

For everyone who ever wanted to breed their dog with their cat to create an unholy army

Developer: Relic

Due: Q3 2002



Oddly enough this was the most disappointing game of the show. With a team of rising stars lead by one-time child prodigy Alex Garden (of Homeworld fame) Impossible Creatures is what has become of Sigma, previewed way back in PCPP#66. Combining animals to create a formidable army, the game has become a fairly standard RTS affair with a base, guard towers, power plants and everything else we saw in Red Alert 2.

Such crazy combinations as giraffe and ant are amusing, but they can only be done before multiplayer games, and a maximum of only 9 different creatures is possible in each army. Although, you can built many of each of these tailor-made creatures. So now the game is similar to those RTSs which allow the player to put different turrets on tank chassis, with a possible 100,000 different combinations.

However, all this said, the game appears impeccable in



execution, with a lush graphical style and funky 30's decore a la Crimson Skies. If you want to play a standard RTS with a bit of a twist, then Impossible Creatures looks to be your bag. It's just sad that at this stage it seems a long long way from the pure revolution of Homeworld.



Microsoft representative and then sped off, pleasure bent.

The four Australians who had made the trip found ourselves the next morning walking along the Strip in perfectly dry air with a brilliant sun blasting unforgivingly out of an eggshell-blue sky. All four of us were squinting heavily, all four of us had dark circles under our eyes, but as far as I could tell, only mine

were the result of something as innocent as a histamine reaction. This was also the point at which my lips started to dry out, but more on that later.

Coffee from Mars

Blessedly, the interior of the Seven nightclub was all but pitch-black, partly to better show off the graphics of the ten titles on display, but mostly to

be forgiving on the tortured systems of the PR reps, who had, in the common vernacular, gone hard. At the supplied breakfast there was coffee that claimed to be the best coffee on the planet. It didn't specify which planet, but we could only assume that it wasn't Earth.

Among the milling throngs of print journos and a snowstorm of business cards emblazoned

with magazine mastheads that all had PC in the title, a TV crew was pushing its way to the front of each exhibit, allowing its impressively hairy and bizarrely dressed star to blurt all over a shellshocked developer, and then pushing its way out again. Then, after filming the same bizarrely dressed star amusingly asleep during each of the keynote



Rise of Nations

Civ3 meets Age of Empires to bring you the entire history of the world in one hour

Developer: Big Huge Games

Due: 2003

Age of Mythology was at the IGF of course, but we'll save that one for a bigger preview next issue. But in the meantime, a new title unveiled for the first time in Vegas deserves attention.

RTSs are typically too quick and dirty to satisfy real strategy nuts, while turn-based games such as Civ3 can often get bogged down in minutiae and managing workers. Big Huge Games - under the control of Brian Reynolds of Sid Meier's Alpha Centauri A Brian Reynolds Game fame - has gone with the crazy idea of combining a large part of the depth and mechanics of Civ3 with the fast-paced competition of Age of Empires. The result: the game we're affectionately going to call Ron.

Atypically for an RTS, Ron has been specifically designed to give the impression of a huge empire rather than a tiny forward base or outpost. There's a cultural border like in Civ3, there are all sorts of



culture, diplomatic, scientific and philosophical advances to pursue, all part of BHG's promise that Ron will deliver the entire history of the world in a one hour multiplayer game.

With more than a year of development still to go, we'll bring you a chunkier preview of our Ron when we've got some more chunks to sink our teeth into...



speeches, the TV crew, a neurotic producer who had spent most of the day screaming at the hairy star, and at least three unnecessarily bright halogen lamps, left the building. My lips, meanwhile, were getting quite dry and starting to crack a little.

It was while I was interviewing Alex Garden of Impossible Creatures fame that, while

interrupted by PR commando to take lunch, one of my esteemed colleagues in the international gaming press stole my minidisc recorder. I guess it could have been one of the caterers, but they had been observed keeping well away from a room full of 500 gaming nuts. By this point my lips had dried out to the extent that it looked like I had been repeatedly punched in the mouth

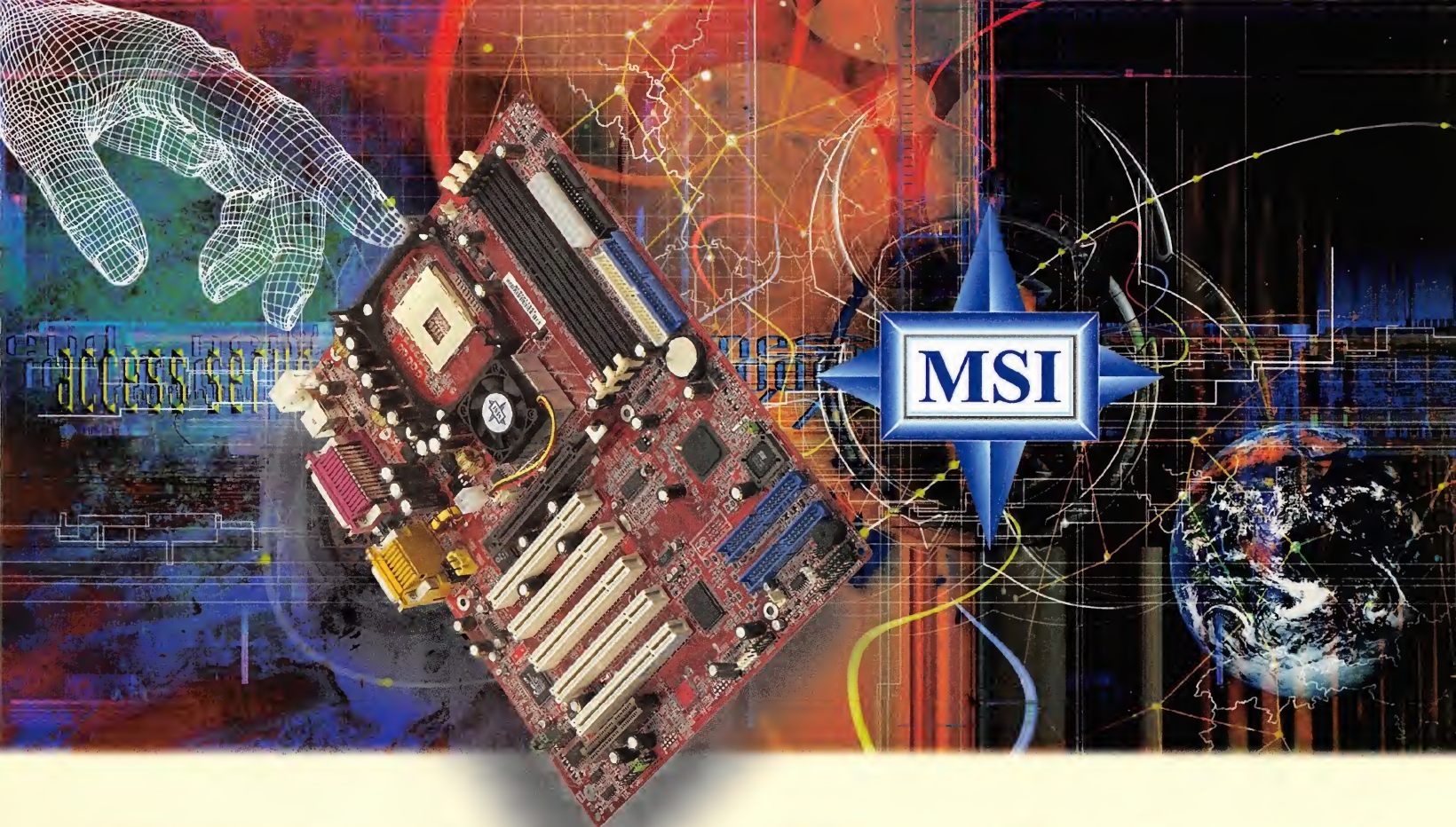
by a large gentleman with meaty fists, and for the remainder of my stay in Sin City, this was to cause concern among service personnel from such disparate establishments as McDonalds all the way up to Caesar's Palace and some kind of security guy in a dinner suit at the MGM Grand. Apparently an Australian staring fixedly at the Grand's tank full of lions with a bloody mouth and

nose was enough to make him ask if I was alright.

And then, to top it all off, on the flight back from Vegas to LAX after a few problems with the brakes, the cowboy pilot assured all travellers that it wasn't possible for us to crash because, and I quote, he had "a wife and five kids at home and I don't wanna die." I could only concur.

Anthony Fordham





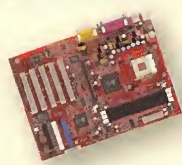
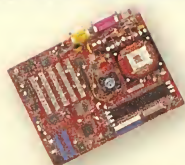
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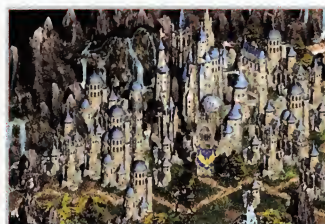
The most authoritative reviews around

It's not too long until the next Star Wars movie hits the cinemas and the anticipation is a palpable sensation around the office. When we received the review cuds for Jedi Knight 2: Jedi Outcast you could taste the tension in the air - who would get it first? Who would have the first opportunity to hone their Jedi powers and swing about a lightsaber? The answer came quickly when it was noticed that Daniel was sitting around looking bored. He was quickly given the task of reviewing the game, quashing forever the hopes that some other nameless people had that they might be the first to sample its delights. How good is it you may ask? Well, it's good enough to warrant four pages and make the gaming PC the most sought after lunchtime spot in Redfern.

In other gaming news it seems to be the month of the RTS with the release of Disciples 2, Warlords Battlecry 2, Kohan: Ahriman's Gift, Star Trek: Bridge Commander and War Commander each as different to the other as night is to day and varying similarly in quality. Disciples 2 proved to be the real sleeper hit with its lush backgrounds and compelling story line making for many tense hours (and some serious mouse hand). The new EverQuest expansion has once again proved to be more addictive than crack cocaine and MW4: Black Knight filled our craving for giant robots.

Due to the release of the 2 new consoles, the Gamecube and XBOX PC releases are beginning to wane in terms of new games as developers are turning to the new formats due to ease of coding and copyright protection. No matter what we will endeavour to bring you all the new games as soon as they are available - that's what PC PowerPlay is all about.

Daniel Wilks
News Editor
danielw@next.com.au



- 50 Jedi Knight 2
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THE PCPP REVIEW SCORING SYSTEM

90+	Gold Award. A classic, everyone will love this game.
89-80	A strong title that's hard to fault. But perhaps not the best in its field.
79-60	Competent and playable. For fans of the genre.
59-40	Decidedly average, probably boring.
39-0	A dog. Bad, shamelessly unoriginal, cheap and horrible. Avoid.
Need	The minimum requirements to get the game running at a playable speed.
Want	The ideal system requirements for the game.
For	The major reasons why you'll like the reviewed game.
Against	The major reasons why you won't.

JK2: Jedi Outcast

Grab your saber and molest some Remnants



DETAILS

DEVELOPER

Raven Software

PUBLISHER

Lucas Arts

DISTRIBUTOR

Activision

PRICE

\$89.95

RATING

MA15+

AVAILABLE

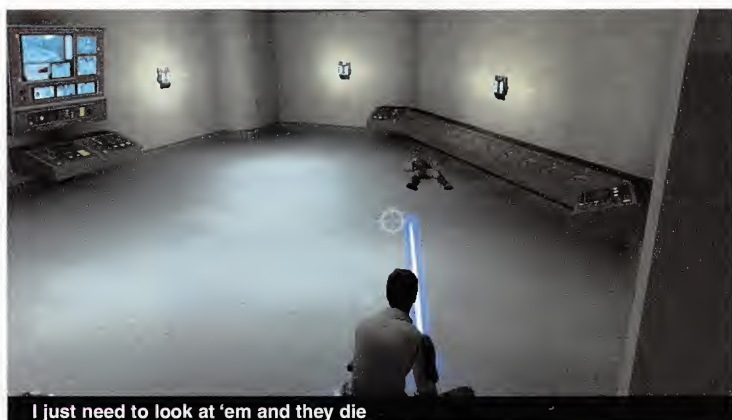
Now



This toilet is enormous



Ah... the searing kiss of light, how I've missed it



I just need to look at 'em and they die



This R2 unit has a faulty... oh forget it

SYSTEM

NEED

PII 350MHz
64Mb RAM
16Mb video card
665Mb HDD

WANT

Duron 750MHz
128Mb RAM
32Mb video card
665Mb HDD

After ridding himself of his Lightsaber and distancing himself from the power of the force after the disaster that was the Valley of the Jedi, Kyle Katarn is once again back in the saddle working for the Rebellion as a mercenary, mopping up the last of the Remnant. It's 8 years after the battle of Endor but there's no time to rest on laurels as Kyle soon discovers the existence of a dark Jedi by the name of Desann and a series of hideous experiments performed by Remnant scientists to artificially graft force powers into ordinary people. It's up to everybody's favourite disgruntled Jedi mercenary, Kyle Katarn to pick up his discarded weapon, re-learn the ways of the force and save the day.

There's something rousing about having Star Wars music blaring at you whilst you receive a mission briefing, making you feel like you're stepping into the shoes of a legend. The opening of Jedi Outcast has exactly this feel, opening with a briefing to Kyle and his trusty partner Jan, Mon Mothma asking them to investigate a supposedly abandoned facility. Of course things go bad and it ends with

a lot of dead Remnant troops, a lot of shooting and things blowing up - what else did you expect? Tea and biscuits? This is Kyle Katarn we're talking about, king of the badass mercenaries. He's not a happy man and he has some anger management issues. Trust us when we say that in his latest outing that he really has something to be mad about. It comes as a bit of a shock when it happens but drives the script along very nicely indeed. And that's all the spoilers you'll be getting.

In this sequel to the hugely popular Jedi Knight everything is bigger, better, faster and more abundant.

"If you don't have the staying power to try everything, then Jedi Outcast may not be the game for you."

Levels are absolutely enormous and although you may only have one or two objectives to achieve you can find yourself running around for literally hours finding stuff to do, miscreants and funny headed aliens to shoot, puzzles to solve or just plain find your way to the next level. Only infrequently does this become frustrating but when it does, hoo-boy, does it become

frustrating. One of the few problems with Jedi Knight is the sheer size of the thing. If you don't have the staying power to try everything, go everywhere and jump around like a bunny on crack then Jedi Outcast may not be the game for you. If it does sound like your cup of tea then you should still keep a few aspirin nearby because I guarantee you at some stage you'll hit yourself in the side of the head for missing such an obvious clue or trick to advancing to the next level. The levels are well designed and full of colour and movement (not to mention enemies) with machines chugging along, droids, blinking

computers, force fields and scads more Star Wars flavoured topping. The majority of levels also necessitate a far more methodical and tactical approach as resorting to twitch gameplay will often result in Kyle falling into a yawning void, never to be seen again (apart from when you reload a saved game). Some of the areas you will battle your way across



Contemporary Dance 101, Wednesdays at 3pm



Another awkward moment in the dance studio: boy-on-boy ballet



Die blue keycard receptors, die!



Are those things leering at me?

BAD HAIR DAY

True to Star Wars style, nearly every character encountered in Jedi Outcast has tragically 70s hair. There's Skywalker, of course, with his cross between a bowl and a pageboy and Mon Mothma who appears to have some kind of rodent perched on her head waiting to pounce on any unsuspecting passerby. Probably the worst hair of all would have to belong to Kyle himself. With a beard and sideburns combo, Kyle looks like he should be singing in a band called "Kyle Katarn and the Kountry Kitchen" or something to that effect.

include Jedi Training Grounds, a deep space mining facility, the lair of a Rodian "colourful business identity" and some favourites from the movies such as the Bespin cloud mining facility and the interior of a Star Destroyer and Death Star.

Whereas force powers in the first Jedi Knight game were customisable - players could choose how Kyle progressed in the ways of the force - Jedi Outcast has a linear approach to powers. As Kyle progresses through

the game he receives new powers from both the light and dark sides. There are seven powers all up and as Kyle progresses through levels the powers increase in potency. Each power has 3 different power levels. Force powers fall into both active and passive varieties, with the active powers being made up of Force Lightening, Push, Pull, Grip, Jump, Speed and Heal. Passive powers are on all of the time without need for activation and take the form of Lightsaber combat. Some fans of the original game may not like the fact that these powers are given out in a linear fashion instead of allowing to tailor the character to their personal tastes but there is a definite upside to creating the game in this fashion. Level designers can make far more complex and puzzle oriented levels when they know what the player is capable of doing. Some levels require things as simple as pushing buttons from a distance whilst others need daring combinations of jumps, grabs, Lightsaber combat and mind tricks. It may be a little linear but it certainly is fun.

The force powers available to Kyle

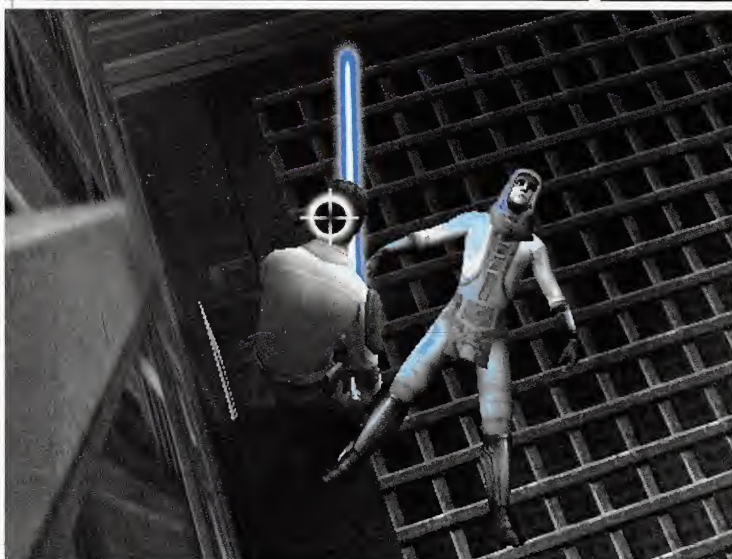
vary greatly as to individual usage and as the power grows can be used for multiple purposes. Force Lightening is one of the most straightforward powers allowing Kyle to channel dark force powers into the target depleting their health until dead or Kyle has run out of force. As the power level goes up the range and damage of the attack increase. Force Jump is also very obvious in its application - the higher the level of the power the higher and further Kyle can jump. Push can be used to push objects, buttons and enemies all over the place - the higher the level the more powerful the push. This power, along with Pull can be used in both combat and non-combat situations. If an enemy is pushed on flat ground they can be knocked down or stunned for a short while, but with a bit of practice it is possible to bash people into walls for extra damage, throw them into other enemies or machinery and push bad guys off ledges causing them to go screaming to their doom. Pull can also be used in a similar fashion but at higher levels can be used to disarm enemies or even steal their weapons to use against them.



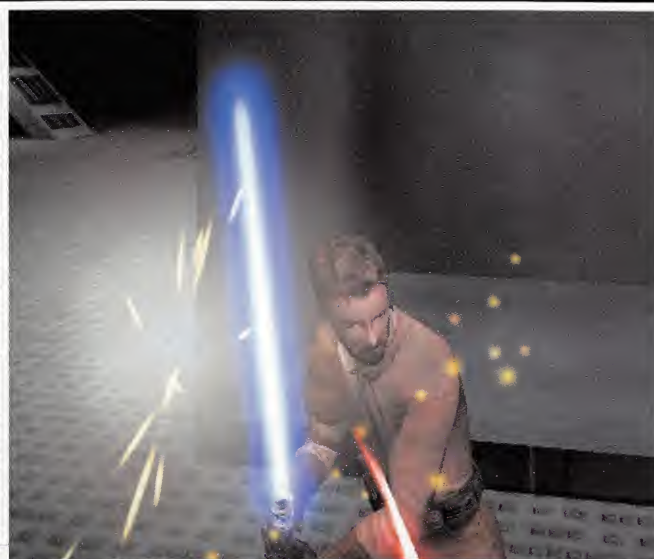
Sometimes a lightsaber just can't give you the blamrage...



But it's a good tool for facing a trio of evil coffee percolators



Oops, I knocked this wax dummy over



Contemporary dance - I'm getting better

Speed allows Kyle to move with superhuman velocity making him harder to hit. At high levels Speed causes the screen to fish-eye which can be quite disorienting, not to mention nauseating. Once you get over wanting to throw up, Speed is very useful in combat situations and is necessary on a number of different levels for getting through timed puzzles. Heal allows Kyle to regenerate wounds on the fly but whilst doing so he is incapable of any other action so you'd better find a nice quiet place to hide before switching the power on. You'll find yourself using this power a lot. A real lot. Grip is your standard force choke move. It's not hugely useful but very satisfying to grab an enemy by the throat, choke them a bit, carry them over to a pit of some kind and drop them in. It's also probably the darkest of your force powers.

As Kyle grows in the ways of the force his Lightsaber combat improves markedly. At the first level of the power he can make a few basic swings and block weapon fire but little else. When the power level increase he learns another stance allowing for more attacks and better defenses. The light

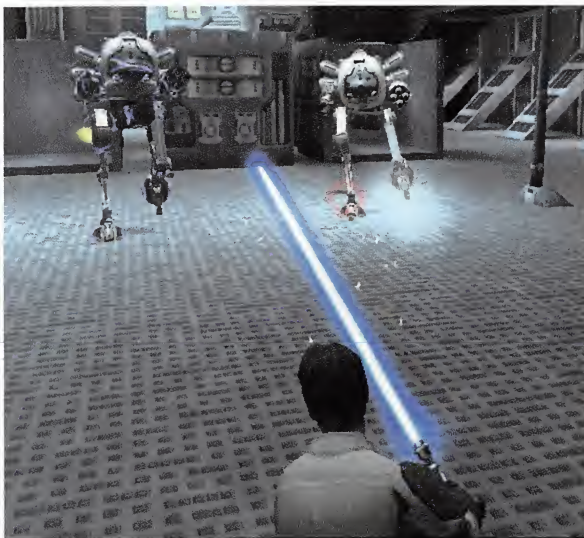
stance allows for faster attacks that do less damage, and conversely the heavy stance makes for some highly damaging but slow attacks. It takes a little practice but with time you'll find yourself switching between the stances and cutting a bloody (or cauterized) swathe through the minions of the Remnant. Second and third level Lightsaber defense also allows Kyle to better aim blocked blaster fire making it possible to mow down enemies without actually having to engage.

Jedi Outcast comes with a full multiplayer option with the standard range of game styles as well as a few with a decidedly Star Wars flavour. As well as CTF, Free-For-All and Deathmatch, Outcast supports some innovative multiplayer games going by titles such as; Holocron, Jedi Master and Capture the Ysalamiri. Holocron plays like a Free-For-All game but with the major difference being force powers which are placed randomly all over the battlefield. These powers can be used to frag people and score points. When a player is killed all of their accrued force powers can be picked up and re-used. Jedi Master is

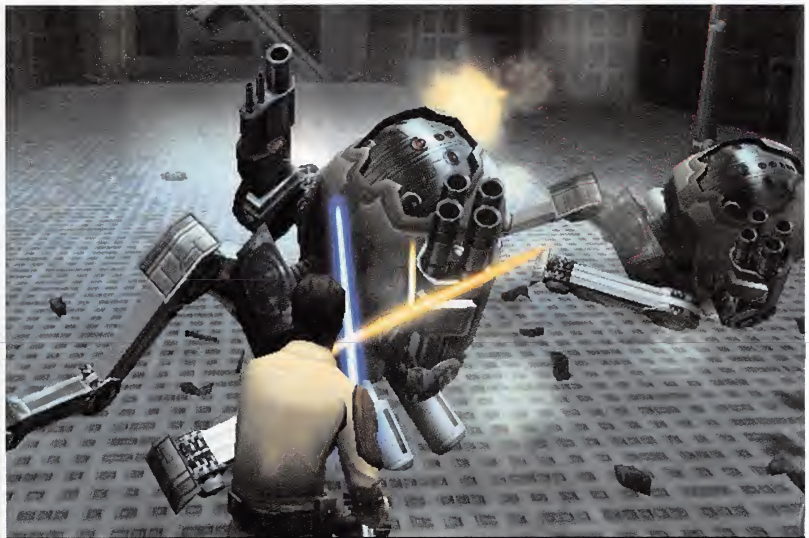
a variant of King of the Hill. Somewhere on the map is a single lightsaber. When a player picks it up they become the Jedi Master. As the master the player can score points by killing any other player. All other players can only score points by killing the Jedi Master. When the master is killed the saber is once again placed on the map. Capture the Ysalamiri is the most Star Wars-ish game in the pack. For those not in the know when it comes to Star Wars fauna, the Ysalamiri is a lizard like creature with the unique ability to dampen force powers. Played like CTF, the Ysalamiri must be brought back to base to score points but the player holding the lizard can't use any force powers.

Players can use most of the skins of the major characters in the game. It's quite a laugh seeing middle-aged and imperious Mon Mothma dressed in senate robes jumping around like a monkey on crack armed with a lightsaber, or maybe that's just us.

When playing Jedi Outcast it's quite hard to believe it uses the Quake III engine. While the levels and character animations look top notch,



Hmn... Mechwarrior 4: Black Knight invades



I hate cigar-smoking robots



Oh now that's GOTTA hurt



Take you seriously? Not with THAT hat matey

WEAPONS OF DESTRUCTION



To aid in his quest for vengeance and justice, Kyle has access to a large range of weapons and devices. Aside from the trusty lightsaber, Kyle can wield his faithful Blaster Pistol, E 11, Disrupter Rifle, Thermal Detonators, Wookie Bowcaster, Heavy Repeater and more. To make each weapon more interesting, all weapons have an alternate fire mode, which range from sniper scopes to being able to bounce shots off walls. Practice these secondary fire modes - they'll save your life.

they do pale slightly in comparison to other recent QIII engine games such as Return to Castle Wolfenstein and Medal of Honor: Allied Assault. Of special note are the death animations of the Remnant troops. By and large they are superb, ranging from a slow crumple to the knees to a flailing,

screaming fall. The only death animation that comes across as somewhat goofy is a back flip. Yes, you read that right, a back flip. It's understandable that the last vestiges of the Empire would put their Storm Troopers through some pretty intense physical training but there's no reason why gymnastics would figure in. The back flip animation would be fine if it didn't look like the troopers were actually jumping and flipping themselves instead of being blown off their feet by the force of the blast. Frequent cut scenes advance the plot without getting in the way of the action too much, though sometimes they will drop you right into the middle of a combat. It's best to always keep on your toes. The game can be played in both first and third person perspective.

The soundtrack is exactly what you would expect from a John Williams score - loud and bombastic at times, ominous at others and quiet and pensive at others still. A dynamic control means that the music nearly always fits the action on screen very nicely so you shouldn't have to worry about a booming militaristic score

when you're trying to sneak up on someone or some quiet reflective refrain during a pitched battle. Voice acting is uniformly very good with the actors playing the villain Desann and his faithful sidekick sounding especially good. Even Skywalker doesn't sound too much like a whiney farm-boy. Unfortunately every now and then Kyle Katarn begins to sound like a New Yorker instead of a grizzled merc. It doesn't happen too often but when it does he sounds like a lower level thug from Goodfellas and we half-expected Joe Pesci to show up and stab him to death.

Though it may not be as creative as its predecessor, Jedi Knight II: Jedi Outcast is a blast to play, full of shooting, running, using the force, blowing stuff up and generally carrying on all antisocial like. The levels are huge and well designed and the puzzles are tough enough to really sink your teeth into. As far as shooters go, Jedi Outcast is great, with enough enemies to keep you busy and a good enough story to keep you interested throughout.

Daniel Wilks

RATING

FOR

- Detailed expansive Levels
- Use of Force Powers
- Lightsabers

AGAINST

- Back flips
- Wandering accents
- Bad hair

OVERALL

Definitely the best Star Wars game to come out in recent years, a blast from start to gripping finish.

90

Motoracer 3

Delphine hits a homer with their third attempt

DETAILS

DEVELOPER

Delphine

PUBLISHER

Electronic Arts

DISTRIBUTOR

Infogrames

PRICE

?

RATING

E (Everyone)

AVAILABLE

Now



Does my bum look big in this?



My engine is already started, baby



Hey is that two bucks?



Steep, this hill

SYSTEM

NEED

P3 500,
64MB Ram,
517HDD

WANT

P3 800,
128MB Ram,
Joystick or
Bike-controller

Who – apart from overly cautious old ladies – has anything bad to say about motorcycles? They're fast, dangerous and very, very cool. It's precisely these qualities that make them ideal subject matter for computer games. Strange then, that there are only a handful of bike games available, especially when compared to the vast surplus of car games on the shelf. Well, the people at Delphine have been doing their darndest to change all that. Their first motorbike title, *Motoracer 1*, instantly stood out - not only for the fantastic sensation of speed that it offered, but also because the option to race two different types of bike (dirt & road bikes) was almost like having two games in one. While *Motoracer 2* was largely forgettable, Delphine has taken a step forward with the third installment and created a worthy successor to the original.

Five Games in One

Following in the footsteps of its predecessors, *Motoracer 3* (MR3) offers varied motorcycling disciplines. There are four different classes of bike available: dirt-bikes, trials-bikes, road-bikes and racing bikes. Furthermore,

there are eight different types of motorbike in each class, combining to give a generous selection throughout the game. The various types of bikes are used in diverse environments and events. You can race on Grand Prix styled tracks (which include Australia's Eastern Creek raceway), blast through traffic in a one-on-one road race, ride on a closed-circuit motocross dirt-track or do aerial tricks in freestyle mode. By far the most difficult and unique racing form is the trials mode. For those who haven't seen this amazing sport on the tube, it requires a meticulous stop-go balancing act to guide the bike around a seemingly impossible obstacle course. It's the first time that this type of motorcycle event has been included in any computer game I've seen - and Delphine deserve a pat on the back, as they've recreated the experience in the cyber-world very pleasingly. The traffic mode stands out in terms of sheer adrenaline pumping action; MR3 is just about worth a look if only to experience the thrill of the exhilarating urban action!

Regrettably, there are only three tracks available for each racing mode - which is barely enough to keep you interested - but Delphine are taking

steps to remedy the problem and a new track is already available for download from the official MR3 website (www.motoracer3.com). One strange omission from the game is a 'Championship Mode' (or equivalent) - your only option is to race independent single races. Winning these races bestows points, which are then used to unlock tracks and bikes. Some may welcome this open-ended style of play, but interest is quickly lost, as not much playing is required to amass sufficient points to unlock every feature in the game. It's always a challenge trying to beat previous best times, but that contest is not going to hold anyone's attention for very long. To be fair, there are actually fifteen levels in the game (three for each of the five racing modes), but regardless of this, MR3 still leaves the overall impression of being inadequately short of tracks.

Simulation or Arcade thrill-ride?

Anyone waiting for *Grand Prix Legends* on two wheels will definitely not be impressed with the ultra forgiving and totally improbable driving physics in MR3. The fact that there is a special 'turbo' button should convince anyone



Ah for the days of my Pee Wee 50...



Look out, it's the God Squad again



It's all about the air... serious air



Evil Kenival rides again... or still... or something

PHYSICALLY PHIT

MR3's driving physics are exactly what's needed for a good, fun, arcade speed-fest. They're not so realistic as to be frustrating, but they're not so unrealistic as to lose the feeling and impression of riding a motorcycle. MR3 may leave real-life riders justifiably sniggering, although I suspect only the most cynical would fail to enjoy it for what it really is – a good game.

that this game has 'arcade' written all over it. But that's not necessarily a bad thing. MR3 was obviously not intended to be a true-to-life simulation. In fact, 'riding' these bikes is exhilarating, in an unsophisticated way. It's possible to power-slide in the dirt, wipeout under power and even burn some serious rubber off the starting line. The suspension moves realistically and looks very authentic in the replays. MR3 is a great arcade blast, especially with the Thrustmaster bike-controller I was privileged enough to be using. However, this is not a game I would recommend playing with the keyboard,

despite its arcade characteristics. Leaning a motorcycle into a corner by tapping an arrow key is definitely not something I'd want to attempt – the physics aren't that far-fetched! A Joystick is an almost must-have (at the least) for any driving-game enthusiast and this is especially true for the two-wheeled variety.

The graphics in MR3 are top-notch, and at times, really exceptional. The bikes are modeled well and the track graphics are, at worst, acceptable. Extravagant light shows occur before the dirt-bike races, which not only look genuine, they also really add to the atmosphere. Although the graphics are good, I'm unconvinced that they warrant such intense system demands. There is a selection of display modes – from 16bit-512x384 to 32bit-1600x1200 – but only a few other things to tweak graphically. Even though my system easily exceeds the 'wanted' specifications, I still choose to run MR3 in 16bit-800x600 in order to get optimum frame-rate. It makes me wonder what sort of super-computer is needed in order to max-out the graphic settings. This is not a huge problem, however, as even at a low resolution

the graphics look respectable, especially with anti-aliasing turned on. My only real gripe with the visuals is that there exists only a couple of distinct on-bike 'cockpit' graphics, thus there's not much diversity if you choose to use this view.

There are a wide variety of engine sounds, made to match the hefty selection of bikes. Although the engines sound decent, none of them quite hits the perfect note, that being the brawny scream emanating from real life racing bikes. The sound track is also fairly run-of-the-mill. Overall, one would be hard-pressed to fault the sound, although MR3 probably won't be blowing your brain with an awesome audio exhibition.

I can't think of a motorcycle game that I've enjoyed more than Motoracer 3, surely a very decent arcade racer that is bound to thrill lighthearted racing fans. Hardcore and finicky biking enthusiasts may be annoyed by the simplistic, fanciful driving physics, but the rest of us will easily succumb to the rev-head buzz of getting enormous air on the dirt bikes and blasting through crowded city streets, not to mention the intuitive, albeit difficult trials mode.

Victor Webster

RATING

FOR

- High quality Graphics
- Value of 5 games in 1
- Great sensation of speed

AGAINST

- No Championship
- Not enough tracks
- Hardware intensive

OVERALL

Fast and furious fun – until you run out of tracks

80

Disciples II

Do you worship the ground I walk on, twice?

DETAILS

DEVELOPER

Strategy First

PUBLISHER

Strategy First

DISTRIBUTOR

GameNation

PRICE

\$79.95

RATING

G

AVAILABLE

Now



Fence is bar...



Suitably Geiger-esque, don't you think my Lord?



No bar, no bar, no returns, nyah nyah...



Can't tip the butcher back!

SYSTEM

NEED

Pentium 2, 32Mb
RAM, 500Mb
HDD, 8Mb
videocard

WANT

Duron 750, 64Mb
RAM, 500Mb HDD,
16Mb DirectX8.0
videocard

Disciples 2, set a decade after the Great War portrayed in the first Disciples game recounts the story of the continuing hostilities between the dwarven Mountain Clans, infernal Legions of the Damned, the humanocentric Empire and moldering Undead Hordes, fighting to rule, dominate, destroy or just plain be left alone. Through a grandiose and suitably arcane plot we discover the fate of Uther, lost son of the dead king of the Empire, now possessed by an evil so absolute all but its followers are trying to destroy it. Through a series of adventure, alliances, schemes, double-crosses and battles the fate of the world will be shaped. Whilst that may seem like a bit of a grand opening it is very fitting for a game so grand in scope. Though the game is based around small unit combat rather than large scale battles the immense breadth of Disciples 2 is evident. At no time are you allowed to forget that the fate of the world is at stake throughout the different missions. Even when playing the "evil" races (demons and undead) there is a definite sense that a wrong move could lead to some extremely

dire circumstances.

Much like the first game, Disciples 2 revolves around recruiting heroes around which adventuring parties are formed. Different lords bestow different abilities upon their troops. Warrior lords are tougher than any other and aid in the regeneration of unit hit points, Mage lords allow the player to research spells at half cost and cast them twice as many times a day and Guildmaster lords cause thieves to have more actions per turn as well as making cities cost less to grow. After the player has chosen their lords, adventuring parties are formed through the recruitment of heroes who can in turn

If it ain't broke, don't fix it, and the formula as used in Disciples is about as far from broke as you can get.

lead lesser troops. Heroes range from typical fantasy staples such as fighters and mages to missile users, thieves and special heroes who can plant "rods", special devices that can convert resources to the players control.

Each of the various races is well balanced but different enough from each other to give a good deal of

longevity to the overall gameplay. Though all of the basic or elite units are similar for all of the races small differences in abilities give a vast range when it comes to strategy. Take for example the magic using units from each race; the humans have Apprentices - dweeby looking little mages who can deal out small amounts of lightning damage to all enemies, the Dwarves have the gentle Tenderfoot who can temporarily boost the damage done by other units, Cultists rain fire on all enemies for the demons and the Initiate spreads disease to all enemy units. Though they may not sound too different (with

the exception of the Tenderfoot), the slight changes between units lead to a number of different tactical tracks.

Basic gameplay revolves around a turn system in which the player maneuvers their troops over the board, upgrades their city structure, converts resources and gets into combat. Combat is small scale, with



Urban sprawl at its most... gothic?



Yeah, well we all know what THAT'S a substitute for...



Disneyland, just before the killer bees attacked



Man, that puddle of urine is just getting bigger and bigger...

sides ranging in size from one unit to a maximum of six. Fewer numbers of troops on the battlefield necessitates the use of tactics, magic and frequent saves as there is simply no option to smash the vast majority of opponents with the sheer weight of numbers. Combat also factors into another important aspect of Disciples 2 - experience and leveling up. At the resolution of each combat, surviving characters receive experience points and level up when they have enough, provided the capitol contains the right buildings for their training. Tactically the leveling up process is very important in the game as which branch you take on the level-up tree can make for some very different combat options. Higher level characters hit harder, faster and have more hit points but also can have immunities to different spells or attacks.

The graphics for Disciples 2 are beautiful but somewhat blocky, limited to 800x600 16bit colour. Character portraits for different troops and monsters are hand drawn and quite beautiful. Likewise the maps are alive with colour and movement, filled as they are with waterfalls, monsters, fires

and what have you. Unfortunately the lushness of the backgrounds often make it hard to see enemy units as well as your own, especially with the Legions of the Damned and the Undead Hordes. These races have red and dark gray landscapes, respectively. The fact that their troops are by and large the same colour makes them difficult to see at best. When it comes to combat the graphics truly shine. All of the units have beautiful combat animations and are large and vibrant on the screen. It would have been nice to see some more detail in the unit models but the very low system specs more than make up for this slight downfall. Spell effects all look great whether you choose to summon a giant suit of living armour or rain fire down upon your enemies.

The soundtrack is generally good if somewhat uninspired, sticking to standard fantasy scores for the most part and rather simplistic weapon clashes, roars, screams and incantations. Being a turn based strategy the sound track isn't of huge importance but it would have been nice to see a little more effort made to make the sound as good as the rest of the game.

Disciples 2 is a game that doesn't stray too far from its roots, choosing rather to build on the successful formula of the first game rather than branch out into new avenues. This is by no means a bad thing. As the old saying goes, "if it ain't broke, don't fix it" and the formula as used in the original Disciples game is about as far from broke as you can get. By no means perfect, Disciples 2 is a challenging and very rewarding gaming experience which should keep players of both turn based strategy and RPG happy for quite a while to come.

Daniel Wilks



RATING

FOR

- Excellent animations
- Compelling gameplay
- Good plot

AGAINST

- Very difficult
- Hard to see enemy troops
- Disciples redux

OVERALL

A well scripted turn based fantasy game for all those who love a (hard) challenge

89

EverQuest

Shadows Of Luclin

DETAILS

DEVELOPER

Verant

PUBLISHER

Sony Online

DISTRIBUTOR

UbiSoft

PRICE

\$59.95

RATING

M15+

AVAILABLE

Now



Even online Anorexia rears its ugly head



Mmmn... stat-tastic



With a name like Daroel he deserves to be PKed



Man, she is seriously blue

SYSTEM

NEED

Windows 98, PIII 400, 256Mb RAM, 16Mb Direct 3D Video Card, DirectX8.1 comp,

WANT

Windows 98, PIII 500, 512Mb RAM, 32Mb Direct 3D Video Card, DirectX8.1 comp, internet

People seem to either love or loathe EverQuest. I was given the job of turning fresh eyes to the mystical phenomenon that is EQ.

I'm not going to claim to have seen all of Norrath, but anyone who makes that claim in earnest is likely to have been sniffing fairy dust. Even before the Luclin expansion EverQuest boasted arguably the largest virtual playing world in existence.

With Luclin's 30-odd new lunar zones Norrath becomes truly epic in dimensions ... but I'm getting ahead of myself...

Being an expansion, I need to start with what's being expanded.

Back in 1999, Verant released the original EverQuest. It allowed thousands of people to adventure in a 3D, fantasy, world as a community experience. They would form guilds and start rivalries, socialise and party, commission other players to undertake missions, craft special items, undertake epic quests, and so on, all with players taking the initiative. The formula was magic and EQ has been hugely successful with several hundred thousand people signing on and paying monthly fees.

It wasn't all nymphs and roses, however. With a creation of this size there were bound to be bugs and, boy, oh boy, were there.

The size and complexity of the world also proved daunting for new comers and level advancement slow, which, while making every level an achievement, also put off many people used to quick rewards.

Furthermore, with so many people playing at once, varying the quests enough was also very tricky meaning that often the game came down to kill-monster-and-take-treasure-and-repeat gaming. Finally, the way the monsters re-spawned led to pools of monsters collecting, just waiting for the next sucker to set them off.

Since its launch EverQuest has been patched on a weekly, if not daily, basis to help stabilise things and two previous expansions as well as the development of specialist game servers, role playing worlds and player-vs.-player worlds have kept EQ ticking along nicely.

New Day Dawning

Recently, new games like Dark Age of Camelot have joined the lists to challenge EverQuest and it's obvious

they have been noting EQ's strengths and shortcomings. Some even dubbed Dark Age an EQ killer.

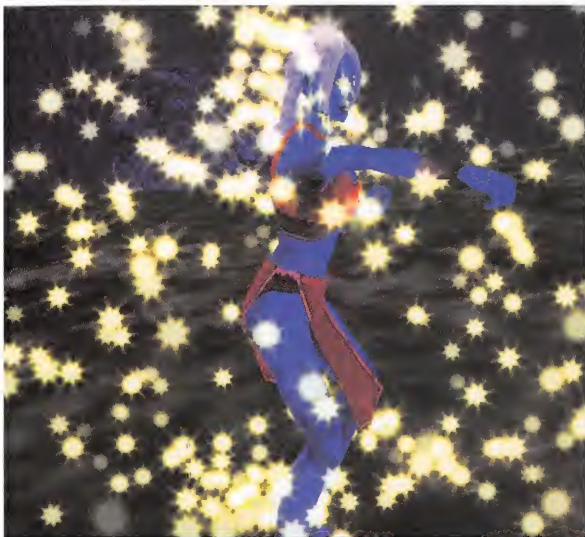
About then Shadows of Luclin hit the scene and put EverQuest right back in the tourney.

The most obvious talking point for Luclin is the major graphics overhaul. All of the player races (as well as many of the monsters) get major enhancement with new textures (for outfits as well as bodies) and more detailed character models, which are now altered to reflect the particular armour a character dons.

Individual characters are now more defined with players given the power to customise their look beyond just choosing one of six or seven faces. Creating a certain look helps with character identification no end.

The overhaul also includes new dynamic lighting and area textures which helps the look of the sometimes bland backgrounds. The graphical improvement is marked. I played with and without Luclin installed and once it went on there was no turning back.

The expansion doesn't only tackle looks. For a while now some players have been right up there in the levels



Pixie dust! Yay!



Uh yeah, we'll let you draw your own conclusions about this guy... er gal... er..



And just what the hell is that between the statue's legs?



Shrek goes nasty...

HOW MUCH RAM?

Okay kids, here's the really bad news: system specs. To be able to see of the new textures, character models and social interaction, as well as cut down on load times, you are looking at needing half a gig of RAM. Yep, that's right, 512Mb of the stuff. At 256Mb you can have half of the new textures without the social interaction. Furthermore, since EQ now needs directX8.1, people with Windows 95 machines can no longer play. Sorry.

stakes and had very little further to go. Now instead of just using experience to go up levels, once you reach the 51st, you can pump a percentage of the points you earn into new areas. You can permanently raise ability scores, resistances and so on, as well as pick up class-specific skills; like fighters being able to attack all foes in a radius and necromancers being permanently invisible to undead. With Luclin, maxing out your character is going to keep even the most hardcore players busy for ages. It's also a really neat solution to samey high-end characters.

Other changes include adding horses to the game (for rapid transport), new items, bringing the tally well into the thousands, new traps, a new race (cat-people, the Vah Shir), the introduction of the Beastlord class as well as adding new quests.

These new quests include ones with complicated, specially scripted, events which can trigger some zones to change hands (between one of several factions) or others that lead to character's pivotal roles in major pre-scripted wars. There are even missions that, for their conclusion, will require a whole guild worth of firepower. Hmmm ... epic.

Shadows of Luclin heralds the biggest single update to EQ since its creation. Although some people like the old ogre models more than the new ones, from what I've seen, everything has changed for the better.

Being in Australia we have actually benefited from having a later release than in the US and UK, and even as I've been playing for this review I've seen new elements added and bugs disappear. Except for the odd crash, and monsters jumping due to lag, the EQ I've been playing has been stable

and more interesting than pub crawl with a satyr (that being said, I'm still new and starry-eyed).

Verant promised an upgraded interface and while it wasn't fully implemented by the time my writing deadline came around, elements like being able to quick equip things or have loot transfer straight off a body into your backpack with a right-click are already making the game smoother to play.

Some people love the slow build of EverQuest, others hate it. Some people love having to establish a group, and fighting through hordes of monsters, others don't. Some will overlook bugs for the experience of role-playing in a massive world with people from across the globe while others will want to boot up Serious Sam and just get busy. While Luclin does make playing easier and prettier, and does introduce some surprises it doesn't change the core ideas or ideals of the game. If you love EQ you'll love this more. If you hate the concept this isn't going to help. If you are new, here's a game which looks good, and has the largest community of any persistent world - which definitely makes it worth a look.

Timothy C. Best

RATING

FOR

- Character customisation
- Improved interface
- Huge world and online community

AGAINST

- Extremely high system req
- Slow level advancement
- Huge investment of time and money

OVERALL

Impressive expansion to one of the most popular games on 'net - if you plan to visit Norrath you need this.

84

Bridge Commander

Hailing Gamers in all Quadrants

DETAILS

DEVELOPER

Totally Games

PUBLISHER

Activision

DISTRIBUTOR

Activision

PRICE

\$69.95

RATING

G 8+

AVAILABLE

Now



A mysterious energy field... how mysterious



A mysterious warp phaser photon beam displacer thing

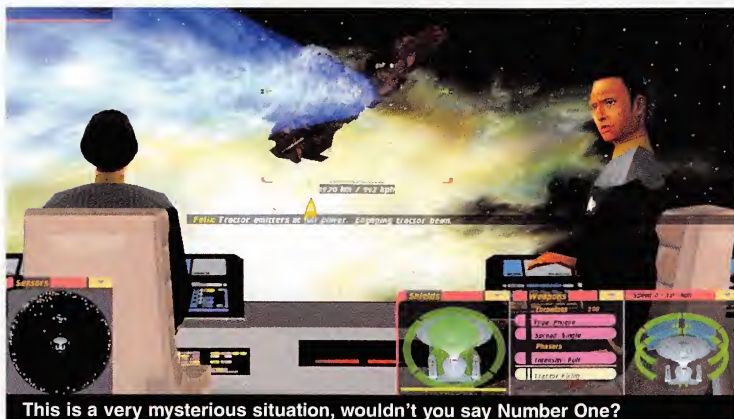
SYSTEM

NEED

PII-450
64MB RAM
16MB videocard
700MB HDD

WANT

PIII-800
128MB RAM
32MB videocard



This is a very mysterious situation, wouldn't you say Number One?



We're being attack! It's a mystery!

RATING

FOR

- Involving Star Trek game
- Good tactical play
- Jean-Luc!

AGAINST

- Favours the Trekkers
- No mid mission saves
- You can't walk the ship

OVERALL

Strong, authentic Star Trek game that gives a glimpse of power.

79

Bridge Commander is the latest title in the long running franchise and perhaps the first to do anything essentially and undeniably Star Trek. As opposed to doing the things other games do with a Star Trek smock on. As a games franchise, Star Trek has had a rocky career. The hardcore would roll their eyes at the lack of depth while common-or-garden gamers would roll their eyes at the lack of fun. More recent titles (including Away Team and The Fallen) have started to explore what it is to Trek the Stars, getting a little closer to the spirit of this noble mythos while maintaining an enjoyable game experience. Are the days of slamming Star Trek games gone?

On my mark!

Bridge Commander offers the prestige of taking the helm of a star fleet vessel. The events leading up to this shock promotion from first officer to captain involve your previous captain (an hirsute Patrick Stewart look alike) meeting an untimely end due to a collapsing star at Vesuvi. From there, the dead man's doppelganger Jean-Luc Picard joins

the bridge to lead you through your first mission.

The game plays out like an episode of Star Trek. A young captain slowly gains the respect of his new crew, while peacekeeping in a region known as the Maelstrom. Each mission plays like a scene. So you'll meet some perturbed Romulans who cry betrayal at the hands of the Federation, attacking some poor vessel that they perceive as a threat. Between the missions, or theatres of war, the crew members' characters are developed through monologues. Their faces on-screen, by the way, are some of the more frightening creations in more times (outside of Resident Evil).

On screen

The game takes place from the captain's seat on the bridge, where you can look around and direct your crew in the operation of the ship. Each aspect of the ship is split between these characters' roles. The helm to move the ship around space, from warping to orbiting a planet; tactical controls the weapons and combat; and the first officer advises

on the mission and alert status, to name a few. The mouse has you moving your head around in first person fashion but that's as far as movement goes - you cannot walk around your starship.

This is not a fast paced space sim where you chase down a dozen enemy vessels and drop a few torpedos into them. Battles are tactical standoffs where strategy plays a big role. Should you target the weapons systems to stop an enemy's attacks or their warp drives to prevent escape? Your capabilities depend on how much power you allocate to four areas: weapons, engines, sensor array and shield generators. Do you power-up your shields and tank it out or boost your weapons for a quick kill. Conserving and effectively using resources is the challenge and fun of Bridge Commander.

The usual fan game proviso: "You'll like it if you like it" holds true to some extent. But for a story driven tactical space game that is more like a naval simulation than they'd care to admit, Bridge Commander is a worthy title.

John Dewhurst

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CD
ROM

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ACTIVISION
2
SPORTS REVOLUTION

ACTIVISION02.COM

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Warlords Battlecry 2

Hit me again you great green rascal!

DETAILS

DEVELOPER

SSG

PUBLISHER

UBI Soft

DISTRIBUTOR

UBI Soft

PRICE

\$79.95

RATING

G

AVAILABLE

Now



Trouble in Dingly-Dell



Look children, ponies!



Wow, God's own coffee mug rings...



Got any coke? Oh...

SYSTEM

NEED

Win98/Me/XP,
PII 350,
64Mb RAM,
8Mb Video,
DX Sound

WANT

PIII 800,
128Mb RAM,
32Mb Video

Etheria is once again swathed in bloodshed as its warlords battle each other for control over all its lands. To the west lie the fetid, stinking undead armies of Colonel Sanders and the Coca Cola cowboys. To the east Mullah Omar Sharif has a thousand 747's circling ominously while from the north come the Scandinavian hordes, their gaily-coloured backpacks and hiking boots blinding all before them, chanting their fearful mantra "Do you know the way to Bondi Beach" It will all end in tears, as they say, but not before you've had a good time.

Warlords Battlecry was SSG's quite successful attempt to take their Warlords series out of the staid world of turn based strategy and hurl it into the sexy, exciting, now world of RTS. It has taken the Strategic Studies Group a while to complete the sequel but given the limited resources available to them, they have done a great job with what would have seemed a very difficult task, challenging Warcraft 3 head on.

If you're completely unfamiliar with the game, Battlecry is a hero-based fantasy RTS with a few RPG

elements thrown in for good measure. Your hero, chosen from one of twelve races, is the centerpiece of your army. He or she can build structures, use spells, convert buildings and units, and rally your troops. The conversion process is almost identical to the one used by priests in Age of Empires and in Battlecry is the only way you can add new resources to your cause.

Your hero also gains experience and goes up levels when they have been earned. They can also choose

Bronzeman and Ironman are even more demanding, deleting your savegames and ending your game completely when you fail.

The missions, or maps, are not thrown at you as in some RTS titles and are no longer part of a fixed storyline as in the original Battlecry but instead part of a world map which you must eventually dominate. The more territories you have under your control the higher your income, which you can use to buy artifacts to aid you in battle.

maps are no longer part of a fixed storyline as in the original Battlecry but instead part of a world map

one of four specialties: Wizard, Warrior, Rogue or Priest. Another new feature in Battlecry II allows you to choose from several different difficulty modes that work a bit like the 'normal' and 'ironman' modes in Diablo 2. Normal mode allows your hero to gain a bit of experience even when he or she dies, tinman mode gives you 25% extra experience but nothing if you lose the map.

Too Many Races?

As previously mentioned there are now twelve races in the game compared to the previous nine. The new races are the Dark Dwarves, Fey and Daemons all of which have new unique units and a Hero. The Fey are mostly magical creatures while the Dwarves and especially the Daemons are fighters.



Destroy that tacky faux pyramid!



Carefully, the trackers of Lilliput stalked their prey



It's like one of those German collectible things you put on the shelf...



What did Eminem say about purple hills?

BATTLECRY II VS WARCRAFT 3

On the surface the two games seem similar enough. The most obvious difference between these two competitors is the 3D gameworld in Warcraft. More important is the streamlined nature of Warcraft's structure compared to Battlecry. Not wanting to balance anything like twelve races Blizzard have opted instead for four. There are also fewer unit types in Warcraft 3, again for the sake of balancing. The most obvious similarity is the use of Heroes who operate in very similar ways in both games. Without a full version of Warcraft to compare it with it is hard to say which is best so at the moment we just say go Aussie!

The inclusion of three new races raises the question of play balance in multiplayer mode, though Battlecry was already pretty good in this respect anyway. It is sometimes very hard to tell in the early stages of a new game's existence whether

or not its balance will work as it takes a while for players to fully get to grips with the possibilities. The Daemons for example have some very powerful units and summoning abilities and may be a little overbearing compared to the other races.

One of the coolest gameplay features of Battlecry II is the variety of AI (or attitude as it's referred to in the game) choices for your units. Battlecry units also have a high degree of initiative, for example it is one of the few games that doesn't force you to micromanage magic users. You don't have to shove your fist up the their frock to get them to do their job as their AI will use their magic wisely with no interference from you. You can also adjust the AI settings on the buildings to make them produce units with the same AI, which is handy as you can specialise different structures.

SSG has added another new element to the mix in the form of the Titans. Titans are the royalty of each of the races, the Dwarf Titan for example is a king borne on a shield litter by his faithful followers. The

Titans dominate the battlefield, cost an arm and three legs to make but are lots of fun to use.

Battlecry II also has a very impressive selection of skirmish options. There are a host of different game types from simple pitched battles with no structures or resources to worry about through to economic challenges that require you to build your wealth rather than your army. The multiplayer features of SSG's latest are equally varied and the free service provided by UBI.com is a welcome bonus.

George Soropos



RATING

FOR

- Player chooses missions
- Great new units and game modes
- Customisable AI for units

AGAINST

- Only supports one save game at a time
- Aver. graphics
- Get swamped by Warcraft 3

OVERALL

A great RTS title with a lot of depth from the masters of strategy at SSG.

88

Kohan

Ahriman's Gift

DETAILS

DEVELOPER

Timegate Studios

PUBLISHER

Strategy First

DISTRIBUTOR

GameNation

PRICE

\$69.95

RATING

G8+

AVAILABLE

Now



The bloodclots are attacking sire!



More stats than the human brain can handle

SYSTEM

NEED

PII-266,
64MB RAM,
700MB HDD,
8Mb Video

WANT

Duron 800,
128MB RAM,
1GB HDD,
8Mb Video



Surrounded by bloodclots, the cerebellum quivered



Okay who flushed the downstairs loo?

RATING

FOR

- Refreshing
- Real strategy
- Multiplayer options

AGAINST

- Inaccessible
- Difficult
- Kinda ugly

OVERALL

A rewarding alternative to the clickfests masquerading as strategy games.

88

For those who find realtime strategy too fast, too chaotic and - crucially - with too little strategy, Timegate Studios salutes you! Kohan: Ahriman's Gift won't challenge Age of Empires or Command & Conquer in terms of popularity or ease of speech (it's pronounced Ko-Hann, by the way, not Ko-Harn), but anyone with a penchant for forethought and deliberation will find much to admire in its exquisitely balanced and cerebrally taxing play mechanics.

Rational economics

Kohan begins by overhauling the traditional RTS economic system in its entirety. Instead of stockpiling resources such as wood, ore, and stone, you must preserve a supply of each to maintain the various components of your empire. Resources are represented as either in the red or in the black. If you produce more wood than you currently require, you either export it for gold or it goes to waste. If you produce less than you need, your empire automatically imports the necessary amount, paying for it with gold. As such, with gold as the primary currency and readily

exchanged, Kohan offers a flexible and plausible economy.

Further, Kohan mines the two primary aspects of the RTS formula - base building and unit combat - and refines them, eliminating unwanted impurities and adding several layers of complexity.

Base building is apparently straightforward, yet fraught with tough decisions. At each level, your cities can only house a specific number of "components" (buildings such as barracks, temples, sawmills, etc), with more room only available when the whole city is upgraded. Individual components can also be upgraded (the library can become an astronomy school or mage guild, for instance), compounding the difficult choices of an already limited selection. Kohan forces you to plan in the short and long term when contemplating any city improvements.

The company of men

Combat units are not recruited individually, but rather as a part of a company, which includes frontline and support troops, plus a leader (who may be either a powerful Kohan hero

or generic captain). Companies may also be grouped together to form regiments, enabling a complementary mix of troops types. Formations and terrain play a huge role in proceedings. So, for example, a good tactic might see infantry (supported by a cleric with healing powers) tackle the enemy head on, while a company of crossbowmen (supported by a ranger with unerring marksmanship) attack from the nearby woods, and a troop of mounted dragoons attempt an outflanking manoeuvre.

As with resources, supply lines affect armies, too. Wounded companies can re-supply (to regenerate their health and morale) at friendly cities and outposts, thus placing an emphasis upon territorial expansion and control, and lending a degree of wargame depth that is very much welcome.

Due to the unfamiliar nature of its game systems, Kohan is initially daunting. Give it time though, and that shroud of confusion will give way to a game of exceptional complexity and depth. Highly recommended.

David Wildgoose

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War Commander

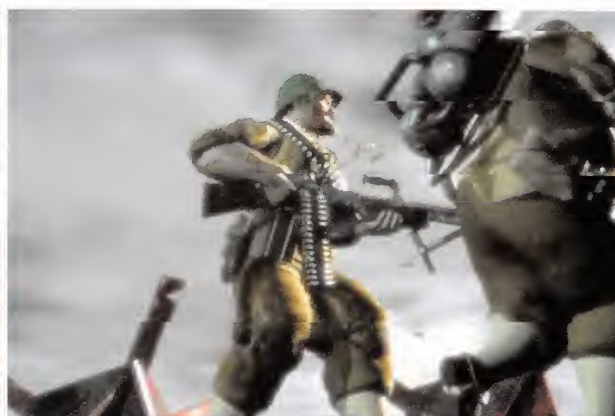
Once more into the bland my friends...

DETAILS

DEVELOPER
CDV
PUBLISHER
CDV
DISTRIBUTOR
Red Ant
PRICE
\$89.95
RATING
M 15+
AVAILABLE
Now



Blurry. Equals exciting. Apparently.



Hang on, is this an Army Men game?

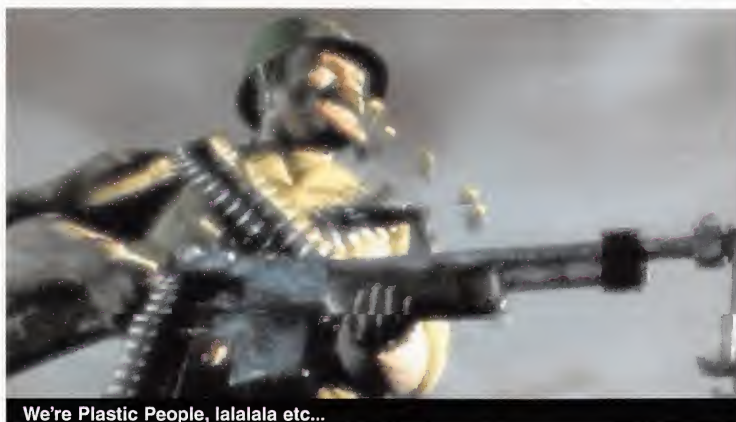
SYSTEM

NEED

PII 450MHz,
64Mb RAM, 16Mb
video card,
600Mb HDD

WANT

PII 650MHz,
128Mb RAM,
32Mb video card,
600Mb HDD



We're Plastic People, lalalala etc...



And this is why we didn't print more screenies...

RATING

FOR

- Probably won't give you cancer
- Non fattening
- Nice opening FMV

AGAINST

- Too hard
- Boring
- Frustrating

OVERALL

Being mown down by superior numbers may be a realistic depiction of war but it does not make for a fun game.

59

It has been frequently stated that war is hell - a world of frustration and agony. Whist that undoubtedly may be true in real life is it really what you want from a computer game? War Commander answers this question and more in a WWII RTS that contains great periods of time doing nothing and then brief moments of being killed a lot. Set during the Normandy Beach campaign, War Commander allows the player to move through two different 12 mission campaigns; Omaha and Utah. As the 2nd US Ranger Battalion the player controls up to 40 units in their quest to aid the war effort. Players must utilise tactics, smarts and all of their available resources to win the day.

Well, that's the idea anyway, what transpires is more along the following lines - the player has a number of troops so small and similar looking that they don't know who's who and after around five minutes of doing nothing an impossibly huge enemy force kills them forcing the player to start all over again. The size of the units is the first of many problems you'll encounter in War Commander.

The individual models, shown on a nicely detailed isometric map are so small that if you don't have 20/20 vision or better you'll spend half your time trying to work out which unit is your sniper. Each of the units has its own class specific skills which you need to use. To survive you'll need to know your units back to front.

From the first mission to the last each is a model of frustration. In both campaigns the first scenario is storming the beaches at Normandy and making it to the rally point. Try as you might to make your way through you'll lose the vast majority of your troops. Sure, this may be a realistic depiction of storming the beaches but it doesn't make for compelling gameplay. Losing units to mortars or enemy positions without being able to do anything about it is pretty far from fun. One of the second missions sets the player the task of defending their base against a German attack. Players have about 10 minutes real time to set up their troops and do a little exploring before the waste product hits the air agitator. From then on wave after wave of Germans smash themselves against your defences. I killed well

over 100 of the Hun bastards and they still kept coming. It was, in a word, frustrating. There's a multiplayer component to the game but it's not much better.

Graphically War Commander is nothing more than OK. The different maps are quite well detailed and look pretty good but the individual units leave a lot to be desired. Animation is OK but the detail is very poor. Oddly enough War Commander can support resolutions of up to 1280x1024 but all that means is that you can notice the lack of detail in units more acutely. The soundtrack, like the rest of the game is very lacklustre, confining itself to some pops, yells and garbled German. Unless you have a serious need to play a Normandy based game give it a miss.

Daniel Wilks





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Mechwarrior 4

Black Knight - Another chunky expansion

DETAILS

DEVELOPER

Cyberlore

PUBLISHER

Microsoft

DISTRIBUTOR

Microsoft

PRICE

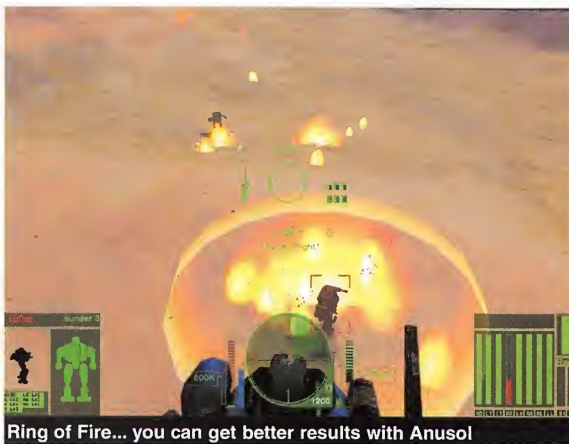
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RATING

G

AVAILABLE

Now



Ring of Fire... you can get better results with Anusol



I feel my servos responding! Phwoar!

SYSTEM

NEED

PII 300,
Win98/Me/2000,
64Mb RAM,
650Mb HD, DX8
sound and video

WANT

PIII 800,
128Mb RAM,
5 button mouse
or 8 button j/stick



Yow! Point that thing somewhere else cowboy!



We're funky, we're funky, yeah yeah yeah...

RATING

FOR

- New mechs, weapons and vehicles
- more mission variety
- New multiplayer game types

AGAINST

- Won't please Battle Tech fans
- Squad AI still suspect in urban environments
- No new 'Instant Action' options

OVERALL

Tougher than the original, adds well balanced weapons and new multiplayer options

79

Hiding a kilo of ripe prawns

inside the Lance Commander's Atlas seemed like a good idea at the time, unfortunately the Davion disciplinary tribunal didn't agree. Stripped of your rank, honour, and the keys to the House Davion executive bathroom, you are no longer a part of the family. However, thanks to the diligence and efficiency of the ISDSS (Inner Sphere Department of Social Security) you have been placed with the Black Knight Legion in a standard work for the dole agreement.

Black Knight is obviously an expansion pack for Mechwarrior 4, a year old PC title based on FASA's Battle Tech board game. A year seems a long time for an expansion pack, perhaps the fact that it was made by Cyberlore instead of the original Mech 4 developers had something to do with it.

Black Knight incorporates a host of new mechs, weapons and other features. There are five 'new' Mechs, some of which will be familiar such as the Uller, and a pile of new weapons as well. The weapons are just developments of existing models like the Ultra AC/10 and 20 and X-Pulse lasers

and the Cluster Bomb which is just a souped up Long Tom artillery piece. However, some of them make a very big difference on the battlefield.

For example, the Clan Ultra AC/20 delivers 36 points of damage for an eighteen-ton load while eight medium X-Pulse lasers will hit for 11 damage every 1.25 seconds and only take eight slots. Because you are now a mercenary (remember Mech 2 Mercenary anyone?) you also have access to the black market.

No longer will your girl have to go without nylons or your buddies without scotch, even those hard to get Mech sized Nikes are a steal. You will definitely need all the hardware and nylons you can get to beat new missions. Unlike the easy, repetitive campaign of the original Cyberlore have done a good job with Black Knight and the missions are tough and addictive. The game is still very much like a Mech FPS though and Battle Tech fans looking or hoping for something deeper will be disappointed (again).

If you're a multiplayer Mech fan Black Knight has even more to offer, five new game types in fact. They are mostly about team play, four out of five of them

at least, and add some new life to the old girl, maybe enough to get people back online and playing.

On the downside, Black Knight still has the same suspect squad mate movement AI, which really gets annoying in urban areas, and there has been nothing whatsoever added to the Instant Action part of the game.

George Soropos

WINDS OF CHANGE

You could argue that the Battle Tech franchise has actually harmed the Mech genre in keeping it too much the same over the years. Microsoft plans to change that with the next releases, adding the ability to get out of your Mech, man turrets and generally get more involved in the story. Activision have already, unsuccessfully, tried a bit of this with Heavy Gear 2 and everyone agrees that something more needs to be done to stop the genre disappearing up it's own heatsink. If you're impatient for all that visit Cyberlore's site and download their 19Mb editor for Mech 4, the same one they used to make Black Knight!

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IN REVIEW

GAMES XBOX

Launch Special - The top 8 games reviewed!

Sure enough, the XBOX has insinuated itself into all areas of gaming, even into these pages that for the past 6 years have covered PC content exclusively. The PC-in-a-box has drawn many premium PC titles to itself and perhaps the most premium is our lead this month.

Halo is... an astonishing game with the controller being the biggest hindrance to luring the typical PC gamer's appreciation. Seeing it for the first time some months ago, I was immediately impressed by the streamlined representation of what has been an essentially PC experience for some time - the First Person Shooter. The AI of the enemies is refreshing, the pacing masterful and the co-op great fun.

It got me thinking that a keyboard and mouse is actually a really odd way to control a figure on screen. I'm reminded of a story from the early days, long before my time, when a brave soul entered a magazine office and introduced the room to mouse and keyboard control. Initial responses were suitably outraged.

Now I swear by the traditional mouse/keyboard setup, but will we see a time when controllers replace this DIY control system? Who can say...

The PC-in-a-box angle goes only so far, since the XBOX is a console after all. So it's wonderful to see some high adrenalin console gaming in our pages at last. The joys of games such as Amped, Batman Vengeance and Project Gotham Racing are worth our attention and we think they're worth yours as well.

We look forward to bringing you coverage of some truly great titles including Madden, Dead or Alive 3 and THPS3 in the coming months. For those unsure of this whole XBOX thing, here's a chance to see what the dedicated PC writers that you read every month think about this strange new land. C'mon, give it a try... maybe you'll like it.

John Dewhurst
johnd@next.com.au



- | | |
|----|-------------------|
| 72 | Halo |
| 76 | Rallisport |
| 78 | Amped |
| 80 | Oddworld |
| 82 | Gotham Racing |
| 83 | Batman: Vengeance |
| 84 | Onimusha |
| 85 | Bloodwake |



THE PCPP REVIEW SCORING SYSTEM

- | | |
|-------|---|
| 90+ | Gold Award. A classic, everyone will love this game. |
| 89-80 | A strong title that's hard to fault. But perhaps not the best in its field. |
| 79-60 | Competent and playable. For fans of the genre. |
| 59-40 | Decidedly average, probably boring. |
| 39-0 | A dog. Bad, shamelessly unoriginal, cheap and horrible. Avoid. |

Halo



As the dropship gradually makes its rugged descent down to terra firma, you peer out the gaping maw of the shuttle bay door and take in the scene before you with quiet, almost reverential awe. The earth below is paradise lost - a tropical Utopia forever blighted with the scars of intergalactic warfare. Waves the colour of Caribbean sapphire gently caress an alien shore and, for a moment, you're almost lulled into complacency by their gentle murmur.

Almost. With a none-too-gentle thud, the starcraft hits dirt. A deluge of troops pour onto the beach and the air begins to crackle with the sound of combat. Just as one of your allies is torn to pieces by a volley of fluorescent plasma, an appreciation for the surreal beauty of this massacre begins to germinate in your brain. This, you realise, is not a standard run and gun job - this is beautiful and intense ... unlike anything you've ever seen before. This, ladies and gentlemen, is Halo.

Aesthetics and Design

Through the ingenious application of design, Bungie has taken the paradigm of tired first person shooters and transcended it with aesthetics - resulting in a game that is as fun to play as it is to watch. With Halo, there's always a vague awareness that you're repeatedly doing the same thing in a continual loop, but it never really manifests itself as boredom or frustration, simply because it's obscured exceptionally well by a liberal application of artistic gloss. I'm not merely talking



Go space monkey, go space monkey, go go go...



It just doesn't get any sweeter than this

Through application of design, Bungie has taken the paradigm of tired first person shooters and transcended it with aesthetics

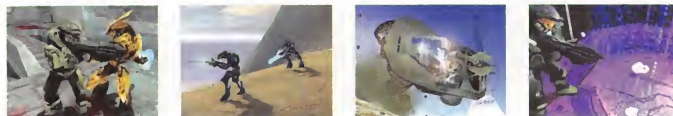
A Novel Idea

What's better than relaxing after a hard day of playing Halo? Why, relaxing after a hard day of playing Halo with Halo the novel, of course! Fall of Reach, penned by Eric Nylund and published by Ballantine, deals with the events that lead up to those in the game and promises to be an epic literary masterpiece of truly breathtaking depth. Or not. Anyway, if you're interested, you can read all about it on Halo's official site at microsoft.com/games/Xbox/halo.asp.

about good graphics here, either - for while Halo's visual presentation is outstanding, an analysis of its general aesthetic must go far beyond an appraisal of polygons and frame rates. No, what we are talking about here is the aesthetic of design.

For example, take the Warthog - Halo's all-purpose moon buggy replete with roof mounted gatling gun. Strictly speaking, this vehicle is not an essential part of Halo's gaming dynamic for the simple reason that shooting aliens does not necessitate its

use. What the Warthog does, however, is fulfil the role of a clever cosmetic device utilised by Bungie to keep player interest peaked throughout the entirety of the game. It is through the shrewd use of such design elements that Bungie manages to diffuse much of the boredom inherent in Halo's more banal moments. Halo's philosophy is not about style over substance; it's about substance through style. It's a difficult thing to pull off with anything even approaching élan, but Bungie have done a sterling job.



Developer: Bungie Software ■ Publisher: Microsoft ■ Distributor: Microsoft ■ Price: \$99.95 ■ Rating: M 15+ ■ Available: Now



The Master Chief - big, green and with something to prove

The 10th Blue Button

As the game's climactic conclusion edges closer and closer, it begins to dawn on one that riding a snowspeeder to press yet another blue button does not change the fact that this is the 10th blue button that's had to be pressed in one sitting. This isn't cause for alarm bells, however, as this infant cynicism is generally thwarted fairly early on because Bungie simply will not allow you any time to cultivate it. Once the start button is pressed and the cleverly designed tutorial is dispensed with, the action in Halo is essentially non-stop from start to finish. Loading screens are few and far between, death results in

an instantaneous respawn at the last savepoint and, best of all, the sprawling levels are all intuitively fluid in their layout.

Only once did I get stuck while playing Halo and that was only because our esteemed Deputy Editor was loudly crunching potato chips behind me, so I didn't hear it when the game gave out the next mission objective. Otherwise, the fluidity with which I progressed through the 10 missions on offer was quicksilver and, often enough, quite exhausting. This intuitive fluidity goes a long way in establishing Halo as a supremely addictive experience. The blisters on my thumbs attest to that. Oh, the sweet agony.



And now the inevitable sniper rifle



Down to specifics...

And with that I'm going to wrap up my meta-level critique of Halo and get down to specifics - let's talk AI. To put it simply, the tactical understanding displayed by both your enemies and allies in Halo far exceeds anything we've ever seen in a first person shooter of this type. The computer reacts quickly, contextually and cleverly, meaning it's not at all rare to find yourself gaping in awe at the depth of it's ersatz intelligence.

The alien beasts can actually

Lost the Plot?

Because Halo's plot is utter tosh, we decided not to deal with it at any great length in the central review. However, for those of you who simply must get their fill of sci-fi drivel, here's Halo's narrative for you in 10 words: aliens, attack, superman, guns, last hope, superweapon, steal, save and Earth. Pretty intense, huh? Well, whoever said the story of any other FPS was even halfway decent?

tell when a sniper scope is being trained on them. Moreover, they'll not only notice it when a shot is being lined up, they'll take evasive action to make sure they're not on the receiving end of a sniper bullet surprise. Some of them will dive for cover, others might unscrupulously hide behind a heavily shielded ally and a few might even take to lobbing grenades in a frantic attempt to escape death. Similarly, in exactly the same circumstance, allied squad mates will lay down suppressive fire to try and negate the effectiveness of such tactics. So, in effect, the computer doesn't just react to the presence of the



Master Chief - it reacts to what he does and how he does it.

The result is a convincing set of AI routines that, when combined with large-scale set-piece battles, make Halo a combat experience quite unlike anything else we've ever seen.

No mouse?

As with any console FPS, Halo's interface was always going to be a point of some contention. It is evident that Bungie has tried to imbue the controls with finesse and, for the most part, they have been successful in this bid. The left pad controls movement, the right stick is used to look and the two triggers fire the primary weapon and grenades. In addition to this standard setup, there are a few notable innovations that try to take advantage of the XBOX controller's somewhat odd construction - the most prominent being the utilisation of the left and right analog sticks as surrogate duck and zoom buttons.

Theoretically speaking, this approach sounds like a clever and appealing utilisation of a control pad's limited resources, so it's odd it turned out to be so ceaselessly irritating. For example, employing the left stick for both moving and ducking was nothing short of sheer folly as the confusion inherent in such a combination presents a source of endless frustration for most players. Try to duck on the spot and you'll regularly find yourself unwillingly moving forward; try to crouch and crawl and the controller will often refuse to register that you've even ducked at all. Similarly, depressing the



'look stick' for sniper zoom frequently results in a wayward aim or an unwanted zoom out due to a careless twitch of the thumb.

Though not terrible, complaints such as these will undoubtedly see the more irate gamers out there screaming in anger. So, if you hail from a history of cracked control pads and smashed CD cases, perhaps you ought to import a Japanese XBOX controller before jumping into the fray.

Wanna join a Halo League?

Halo's multiplayer component is a big selling point for Microsoft and Bungie, so it's a shame that, while robust, it simply fails to compete with the PC supergiants in terms of pure fun. This failure is essentially and inevitably attributable to the fact that Halo is not capable of online play. For while Bungie is right to say it is entirely possible to have eight-a-



Take control of alien fighters and crash them ineptly...

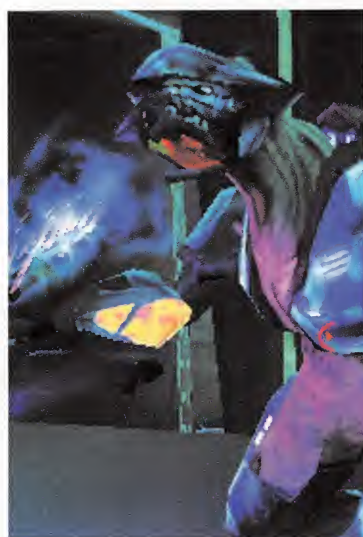
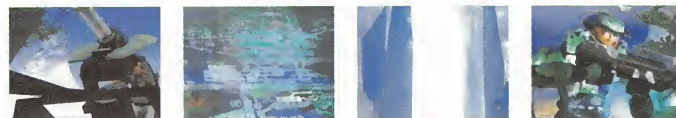
side CTF extravaganzas, the Herculean amount of organisation this would involve will simply outstrip most gamers' desire to partake in them. Think about it: if one wants to setup a 16 player game of Halo, one will need 4 XBOX consoles, 4 copies of Halo, 4 televisions, 16 controllers and 16 people willing to play ... all in the one place at the one time. Maybe it's just the jaded gamer in me lashing out here, but I can't see that happening very often - can you?

So, keeping in mind that local Halo leagues are not likely to spontaneously spring up all over the world upon the game's release, it becomes obvious that most people's multiplayer experiences in this title are

generally going to be limited to the traditional and accessible split screen model. This renders a good deal of the 26 available multiplayer modes on offer useless and entails that most of you will have but two viable options open to you when playing Halo with friends - deathmatching or co-op play.

Tight arenas, a finely balanced





Not an ally

set of slightly impotent weapons and a sluggish pace conspire to make Halo's deathmatch look like little more than a next-gen remake of an already refined formula. This shouldn't be a problem for the 3 of you out there who haven't played GoldenEye, but for the rest of us it inevitably means this particular component lacks any kind of long-term appeal.

Correspondingly, the co-op campaign mode is also genuinely fun for a few hours but ultimately bereft of longevity and lasting charm. It is obvious Bungie did not design Halo's campaign with multiplayer in mind, because there are no narrative changes to accommodate a second player nor are mission objectives



Anyone for some cricket?



Yeah man, step into the light

Halo=Quake 2002

If you do end up purchasing Halo, however, it won't be because of its multiplayer options. Instead, you will buy Bungie's masterpiece because it is the Quake of console gaming: the ultimate evolution of the straightforward shooter. Like Quake, Halo's aesthetic beauty is both breathtaking in itself and as a means to a flawlessly fluid gaming dynamic. Like Quake, Halo effortlessly combines anxiety with

action to create an engaging and addictive combat experience. Like Quake, Halo takes a genre paradigm and evolves it with technology. And most importantly, like Quake, Halo is one of the best first person shooters we've ever had the pleasure of playing. And it's all played with a control pad too. Huh. Who'd have thought?

updated to take advantage of a two man team. It really does dissipate the atmosphere of camaraderie when both players are addressed as one person and cut scenes see you and your friend magically melded together into a single entity. The inclusion of 'driver/gunner' vehicles like the Warthog and the Scorpion does indeed dull the above flaws somewhat, but not for long.

Daniel Staines



Oops

Score

The best XBOX launch title bar none. Proves that FPS can work on a console. Now we just want the PC port

94

RalliSport



Going Bush

While it's nice to be able to thrash around in the underbrush giggling hysterically while the race goes on, this can't really be done in Rallisport. It's not actually possible to drive much more than about fifteen metres off the side of the track, or the view fades out and the car is reset to the middle of the road. So opportunities for rolling down a thirty metre cliff into raging surf, a la Pro Rally 2001, sadly do not exist.

Now we know why EA's V8

Challenge was only pretty good rather than completely spectacular. It's because DICE has been working on Rallisport Challenge.

Quite simply this is the best driving game currently available for the XBOX and everyone should own it. At its most essential, Rallisport is a fantasy Rally game. Why fantasy? Because each of the huge variety of cars is carefully modelled and the driving engine is quite authentic, the sheer number of crazy events available to each driver and the damage model makes Rallisport a cartoon of rally driving, but in the sense that a cartoon is meant to enhance all the best bits of an idea and make it all the more enjoyable.

Two things strike you immediately once the light goes green; the sensation of speed and the draw distance. Pop-up is a thing of the past.

Rallisport's engine is quite capable of rendering the entire side of a mountain and we can at last get sweet chopper-cam shots during replays. Long straights stretch to the horizon, entire series of switchbacks can be spotted and anticipated and it's actually possible to plan ahead those vital few seconds while hurtling toward a mountain lake at 200kph.

And hurtle is the word. Rallisport is one of the fastest driving games we've ever seen and the variety of road surfaces makes it even more precarious. This is a game where you'll have to reduce speed at times to ensure your adrenal gland doesn't explode.



Level of detail is nothing short of spec-freaking-tacular



Heheh forty gallon drums, always amusing

Draw distance is so good it's actually possible to plan ahead those vital few seconds while hurtling toward a mountain lake at 200kph.

There are four main competition areas; ordinary Rally, Hill Climb, Ice Racing around a circuit and Rallycross, which is also a circuit-based race. Naturally the game supports four-player splitscreen and there is no perceptible drop in frame-rate when all controllers are in use. Because of the essentially rough-and-tumble nature of this kind of driving, multiplayer works exceptionally well among friends who like to put each other off the road but don't want to be punished too

hard for doing so.

Which brings us to the damage model, which is extremely forgiving. It's possible to flip the car, bounce it off two trees and then keep right on driving with nary a scratch, and in this case it's okay, because DICE has tuned the competition in career mode in such a way that penalising players for crashing their cars would just be pointless - this is a game about racing and getting the best time and unlocking more tracks and cars.



Developer: Dice ■ Publisher: Microsoft ■ Distributor: Microsoft ■ Price: \$89.95 ■ Rating: G8+ ■ Available: Now



Because product placement ain't product placement...



Two hands for beginners

Rallisport is no Colin McRae that's for sure, but then it's not meant to be some kind of overblown and difficult simulator, but rather a slick and speedy impression of rallying for people who want to get out on bad roads and throw a little car around secure in the knowledge that they don't have to pay for the damage. In single-race mode there are even three other cars on the track at the same time as the player, so there's plenty of opportunity for jostling and ramming people into rocks.

There are more than 30 tracks and a similar number of vehicles from all schools of off-road racing as well as a few oddbods like the Volkswagen bug and the Nissan Skyline GTR. The cars are unlocked at a carefully paced rate, so winning two races in a row in career mode will result in some kind of nice new toy to play with. Some cars even have

different versions specific to the kind of event, such as the Hill Climb version of the redoubtable Impreza or the rallycross model of the Citroen Xsara.

So a fast, dirty, rewarding rallying experience with graphics to die for and an engaging multiplayer mode to boot. Get it now!

Anthony Fordham

Score

Cartoonish, but with enough depth and authenticity to satisfy the demolition nut in all of us. Plus no pop-up.

92



Ice racing - sensuously slippery

Amped

Developer: Bluetorch ■ Publisher: Microsoft ■ Distributor: Microsoft ■ Price: \$99.95 ■ Rating: G ■ Available: Now

Amped is freestyle snowboarding with as much freestyle as snowboarding. As a budding pro snowboarder, players chase high scores, endorsements and showdowns with big name boarders to advance their world ranking and prestige. Each level is modelled after a real-world mountain that your personalised snowboarder hurtles down, negotiating various jumps, rails and obstacles in pursuit of various rewards of high scores, skill improvements and better equipment. Landing tricks is the name of the game and Amped puts a nice spin on a familiar formula.

The basic courses are where high scores are attempted and where media points are gained. Pulling off big tricks to impress the media is the way to raise profile. The pro courses have you following a pro's line down the mountain and match his tricks. Sponsor runs ask you to impress potential sponsors with particular tricks such as rails or big air.

None of this would mean anything if the basic thrill of sliding down a mountain wasn't



133+ skillz, 133+ skillz! Yaaaaaagh!



Damn I dropped a contact lens

amazing. The feeling of flying down a slope or pulling off spins and flips, or jibbing off a fallen trees down into a frozen valley is exhilarating, plumes of powder puff up as other riders pull their moves in front of you. The action is break-neck and liberating. In its basic mechanics, the game is satisfies.

As the difficulty level rises, some annoying elements start to become obvious. Grinding is rather unforgiving as you need to be right on top of the rail to land it - there's no user-friendly sticking (props to THPS). Landing big tricks can be frustrating as even the slightest deviation from good position will have the boarder tumbling in the snow. The result is

a game that is more demanding than you might expect. Multiplayer is limited to turn based duelling for two to four players, and doesn't include a split screen mode - a notable omission.

This is perhaps the most accessible of the XBOX launch titles. In the end, Amped is a stunning, high-action thrill ride that is as important to the XBOX experience as its more cerebral brethren.

John Dewhurst

Fashion

Like Wipeout and Tony Hawk before it, Amped trades cool by advertising that which is cool: the labels (Dragon, Volcom), the language and the music. The latest hip lingo is on display as you roll down the mountain and various pearls of wisdom issue from the mouths of cameramen and pros. The soundtrack features over 150 indie tracks ranging from hip hop, to rock, to emo, to punk and more. CDs can also be ripped to the hard drive. Cool...



Splat. Dude, you suck!



Score

Intense, high speed action makes Amped a compulsive extreme sports romp, let down somewhat by unforgiving trick execution and minor mulitplayer options.

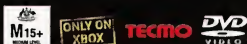
89

FAKE NEVER LOOKED SO REAL.



Fantasy has a new reality in Dead or Alive 3, the next instalment in gaming's most popular "beat'em up" series. Experience multi-tiered fighting environments, a kinetic "tag-battle" feature and some female opponents that'll knock you for dead.

DEAD OR ALIVE 3



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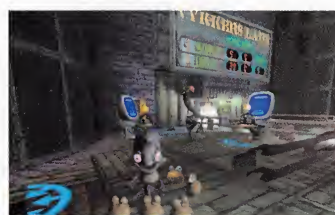
Munch's Oddysee

Developer: Oddworld Inhabitants ■ Publisher: Microsoft ■ Distributor: Microsoft ■ Price: \$89.95 ■ Rating: M15+ ■ Available: Now

After two massive successes on PlayStation, PS2 and PC, the franchise that revitalised the 2D platformer has made the inevitable and perhaps misguided leap to 3D and Microsoft's next-gen console.

For those unfamiliar with the exploits of Abe the Mudokon, the first two games titled Abe's Oddysee and Abe's Exoddus combined old-school 2D platforming with revolutionary puzzle-solving dynamics involving the use of Gamespeak, whereby the player could communicate with other NPCs in the game universe.

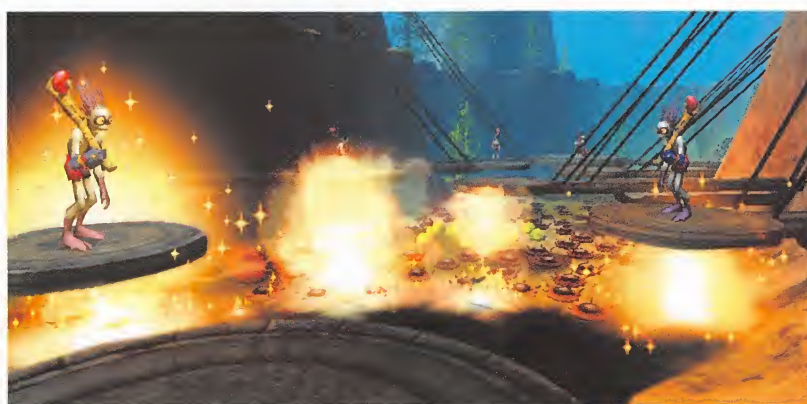
Munch takes most of this familiar material and mashes it into a streamlined 3D universe that makes adequate use of the XBOX's graphical power. The environments remain typically unique and now the intricate details of the Oddworld backdrops can now be travelled through in realtime. For some reason though, the draw distance is much closer than in other launch titles, making the otherwise beautiful world feel somewhat drowned in murky grey fog.



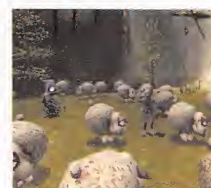
Munch and the Furies - so cute



Coin collecting. Why why why?



This looks like an awkward situation. Better fart, that'll fix it



Gameplay has been streamlined, with single button presses now doing the work of numerous gamespeak actions. While this does make for a more intuitive process mostly, occasionally there are frustrating moments where a button press has an unexpected result because Abe is standing too close to a switch or lever.

The elegant stat-free world of the original games is gone replaced with a counter for both life points and the collection of a local fungus called spooce (read: coins) which must be used to activate various machines and puzzles.

The inclusion of a second character - Munch - is welcome,

but overall it appears as if the move to 3D, while making for a much prettier game, has nevertheless restricted Oddworld Inhabitants in its ability to create intriguing and challenging puzzles. Abe's latest adventure sees him gaining a dimension but losing a distressing amount of IQ.

Solid, enjoyable and imaginative, but perhaps now limited to an appreciation by a younger audience.

Anthony Fordham

Spicy Variety

The original Abe games were simple in execution, with only a handful of different creatures, traps and puzzle types to encounter, and this was good. Munch has an enormous menagerie of different beasts including swimming Slogs and super-Slugs with multiple machine guns and grenade launchers. Rather than creating a rich world though, all these critters seem a little gimmicky, almost as if they've been implemented to distract you from the lacklustre gameplay. But then again, that could just be me.

Score

3D platformers never seem to work quite right, and Munch's Oddysee is no exception. For the best in 2D gaming, stick to the originals.

81

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McCANN XBOX32/HALO/C

Project Gotham Racing



Developer: Bizarre Creations ■ Publisher: Microsoft ■ Distributor: Microsoft ■ Price: \$99.95 ■ Rating: G ■ Available: Now

First impressions are important but don't always tell the whole story. Project Gotham Racing (Gotham) seems to want the glamour and authenticity of a Gran Turismo but on closer inspection, the truth of the matter is revealed. These are lovingly recreated vehicles... but it's all about skillz, baby.

Project Gotham Racing places you behind the wheel of some of the finest automobiles on the planet and asks - nay demands - that you drive with speed and flare through the streets of four big cities: San Francisco, Tokyo, New York and London. That means getting up on two wheels, sliding round corners, negotiating witch's hat gates and getting airborne. All of these feats are in pursuit of elusive Kudos points. Skilful driving accumulates kudos and will also gobsmack onlookers - a far more satisfying measure of glory and renown in any case.

There are a number of game types including Quick Race, Arcade Race and Time Attack modes but the centrepiece of Gotham is the Kudos Challenge, with 12 levels and nine different racing challenges. This could



The Ferrari F50 - grunt-tastic



The red one goes faster, you know



Muscle cars and thin roads. Just the way we like it

include racing one on one against another car, recording fast lap times or gaining a high enough average speed. Each stage requires a set number of kudos points to be achieved in a race in order to gain medals: bronze, silver and gold. Winning medals unlocks new tracks and cars. The catch is that gold medals and higher levels are sufficiently tricky that in order to achieve the requisite kudos, you'll have to up the difficulty to win bonus points.

Gotham's strength is the wide variety of play available, through not only the vastly different challenges but also the cars, which move and handle in truly unique ways. The Mini Cooper S is a personal favourite with its

supreme handling but monsters like the Ferrari F50 are worth the hours needed to unlock them.

Project Gotham Racing is a game that achieves the rare feat of placing style and substance at an equally high standard. Racing aficionados will be impressed by the driving model and the extended challenge, while the casual driver will love the mayhem. Exceptional execution of a great driving concept.

John Dewhurst

Short Circuit

Four cities might sound limiting for course variety but each successive track is subtly different from the last. By presenting varied circuits through one city, each is noticeably different from a driving perspective and allows an expanding perspective of that city. This is quite apart from the altered positioning of witch's hats that can significantly change a single turn, let alone an entire circuit. There are over fifty individual circuits to challenge.

Score

Premium racing with the realism that the connoisseurs favour and the thrills that the gamers want. A must-own racing title for the XBOX.

90

Batman: Vengeance

Developer: Ubi Soft ■ Publisher: Ubi Soft ■ Distributor: Ubi Soft ■ Price: \$99.95 ■ Rating: M ■ Available: Now

It's a sad but true fact that there haven't been too many superhero games worth much chop, but *Batman: Vengeance* is definitely a step in the right direction. Based on the recent animated series, *Batman: Vengeance* puts you in control of the titular caped crusader as he swings, punches, runs, climbs, glides, drives and flies through Gotham city in pursuit of some of the deadliest foes in his rogue's gallery. With a plot revolving around experimental pharmaceuticals, a woman with no past and a kidnapped child, *Batman: Vengeance* draws you in from frame one, but unfortunately some control quibbles may put paid to this immersion.

Gameplay mostly revolves around guiding Batman throughout the different levels solving puzzles and apprehending evildoers though there are levels where you fly the Batplane or drive the Batmobile. To help in the fight against crime, Batman has access to a number of gadgets that can be used on different levels such as batarangs for knocking weapons out of hands, electric batarangs for use against tougher targets, bat-



A showdown in a factory... how unexpected



Ha ha, I kill you with electricity, how shocking!



Do the Batusi

Like the animated television series, *Batman: Vengeance* has an excellent sound track and equally good voice acting. The score is suitably bombastic at times and wonderfully ominous at others whilst still keeping that Saturday morning cartoon feel. Voice acting is universally excellent with special mention going to Luke Skywalker himself, Mark Hamill as the Joker. He may not have been very good in his movies (all of them), but in the animated series and *Batman: Vengeance* he's fantastic.

cuffs for restraining villains and remote charges amongst others. Most tools are used in a first person view, which is one of the major problems in the game. Switching between views takes time and severely limits what you can see on a level making the game far more frustrating and difficult than it should be. Also hampering the game is poor a camera that can switch angles at the slightest provocation leading to falls off ledges, being unable to see where you're going or allowing enemies to sneak up on you far too easily.

Batman: *Vengeance* looks beautiful and feels much like playing through a 3D rendered episode of the cartoon. Though the animations some times do get

jerky for the most part they are lovely and fluid with vibrant colours (with the exception of the all too somber Bat) adding to the comic feeling of the game. The only real graphical gripe is that the lip-synching is non-existent. When characters talk they just wag their mouths for a roughly analogous amount of time. *Batman: Vengeance* is a solid thinking persons action game that's definitely worth a look in as long as you can cope with the poor controls and tricky camera.

Score

One of the first superhero games that can be played by people other than fans of the genre.

85

Genma Onimusha

Developer: Capcom ■ Publisher: Capcom ■ Distributor: THQ ■ Price: \$99.95 ■ Rating: MA 15+ ■ Available: Now

Samurai, Demons and scantily clad Ninja women populate Genma Onimusha, the Xbox port of the award winning survival horror game Onimusha: Warlords originally published on the PS2. Set in feudal Japan, Genma Onimusha casts the player as Samanosuke Akechi, a wandering samurai and friend/protector of Princess Yuki of the Inabayama clan that is currently under siege from the forces of the evil warlord Nobunaga Oda and some far more infernal forces. Nobunaga Oda, slain on the battlefield has been resurrected by demons and now serves their unholy cause. Equipped with the Ogre Gauntlet, a magical device that allows our hero, Samanosuke to absorb the souls of his slain enemies, with help from a beautiful female ninja he must save the princess and in the process discover just what the hell is going on.

Capcom, renowned for their survival horror games has pulled out all the stops with Genma Onimusha, serving up a heaped helping of scares, combat, creepy monsters and appealing puzzles. Unlike Resident Evil the focus of Onimusha is firmly placed on combat with hordes of monsters (some of whom respawn) littering the levels. Combat is simple and



What the hell is that?



Now that's just nasty



The few, the proud, the icky



straightforward to control with only three buttons you really need to worry about, attack, block and magic. Once you master those three things you'll be hacking up the legions of hell like there's no tomorrow. When an opponent is killed it will release its soul. Souls come in four different flavours, each with their own specific purpose but all very useful.

Genma Onimusha is a very beautiful game to play replete with some outstanding pre rendered levels, spooky looking beasts and smooth animations. The opening FMV is purely showing off (though it does introduce the story nicely), with hundreds of Samurai fighting and dying, monsters, bloody death

and maggot infested corpses all lovingly rendered and animated. Frequent FMV sequences throughout the game also show some of the true graphical potential of the Xbox. Foley and soundtrack work equally well, enhancing the atmosphere whilst remaining subtle enough that they don't overpower what's going on in the game. If horror's your bag then Genma Onimusha is the Xbox title for you.

Daniel Wilks

Soul Sucking

Different souls have different purposes that greatly effect game play. Red souls, the most common by far can be saved to enhance weapons and items making the character deadlier and more hardy. Blue souls recharge magic allowing for devastating attacks and yellow souls heal the samurai. By far the most useful are green souls. When five of these are gathered then Samanosuke can make himself invulnerable for a short while - you'll need that a lot.

Score

A tight, spooky and great survival horror game enhanced by wonderful FMV and an outstanding soundtrack - it's just a little short.

89

Blood Wake

Developer: Stormfront Studios ■ Publisher: Microsoft ■ Distributor: Microsoft ■ Price: \$99.95 ■ Rating: G ■ Available: Now

Every now and then a game appears that revolutionises the genre. Blood Wake is not one of these games, though it does try (mostly unsuccessfully) to add some new elements to the vehicular combat style of game. Set entirely in an unnamed South East Asian body of water, Blood Wake puts you in the role of a young man kidnapped by pirates and forced to work for them as the captain of a weapon-bristling speedboat. Over the course of 21 missions you sail around, shoot things and generally act like a water-borne hoon.

Though the premise does have some definite potential, Blood Wake is a tedious game full of repetitive and extremely dull missions, poor control and bad voice-overs. Each of the various missions relies mostly on sending wave after wave of enemy vessels against you, followed by a final wave of incredibly tough boats. The only difference between scenarios being whether the battle is fought in open seas or in enclosed waterways. If that weren't

Multi-player Madness

As is expected with modern games, Blood Wake comes with a multi-player mode. Unfortunately the vast majority of it is locked and can only be unlocked by playing through the single-player game at different difficulties. Not only is it frustrating to have to play through the single-player but the feeling is multiplied by the fact that multi-player just isn't very good. The maps are dull and weapon balance poor - whoever gets the homing torpedoes wins.



Foiled by crates, just my luck



Blam! The boat flips over for NO REASON AT ALL

bad enough, Blood Wake features no in game save meaning that the missions are not only dull and frustrating but you'll have to try them again and again to actually finish. Static and very wordy cut scenes introduce the various missions but have no fear, if you miss what the pirates are saying you'll be no worse off. Come to think of it it's probably better you don't listen as the voice acting is unforgivably bad. To add a final insult to injury control is difficult due to the water physics and accidentally clicking the left thumb stick can make you reverse.

Fortunately there are a few good points to Blood Wake, most notably the physics engine and the graphics engine. Whilst Blood Wake doesn't have the most

realistic looking water in any game around (waves never break, splashes only ever come from the sides of a boat, etc), the overall feel of the water is very good. Most of the time you need to fight tooth and nail to keep the boat under control. Graphics are nicely functional with some good-looking boats and shorelines. More like an interesting tech demo than a full game, Blood Wake may keep your attention for a few hours but not a great deal more.

Daniel Wilks

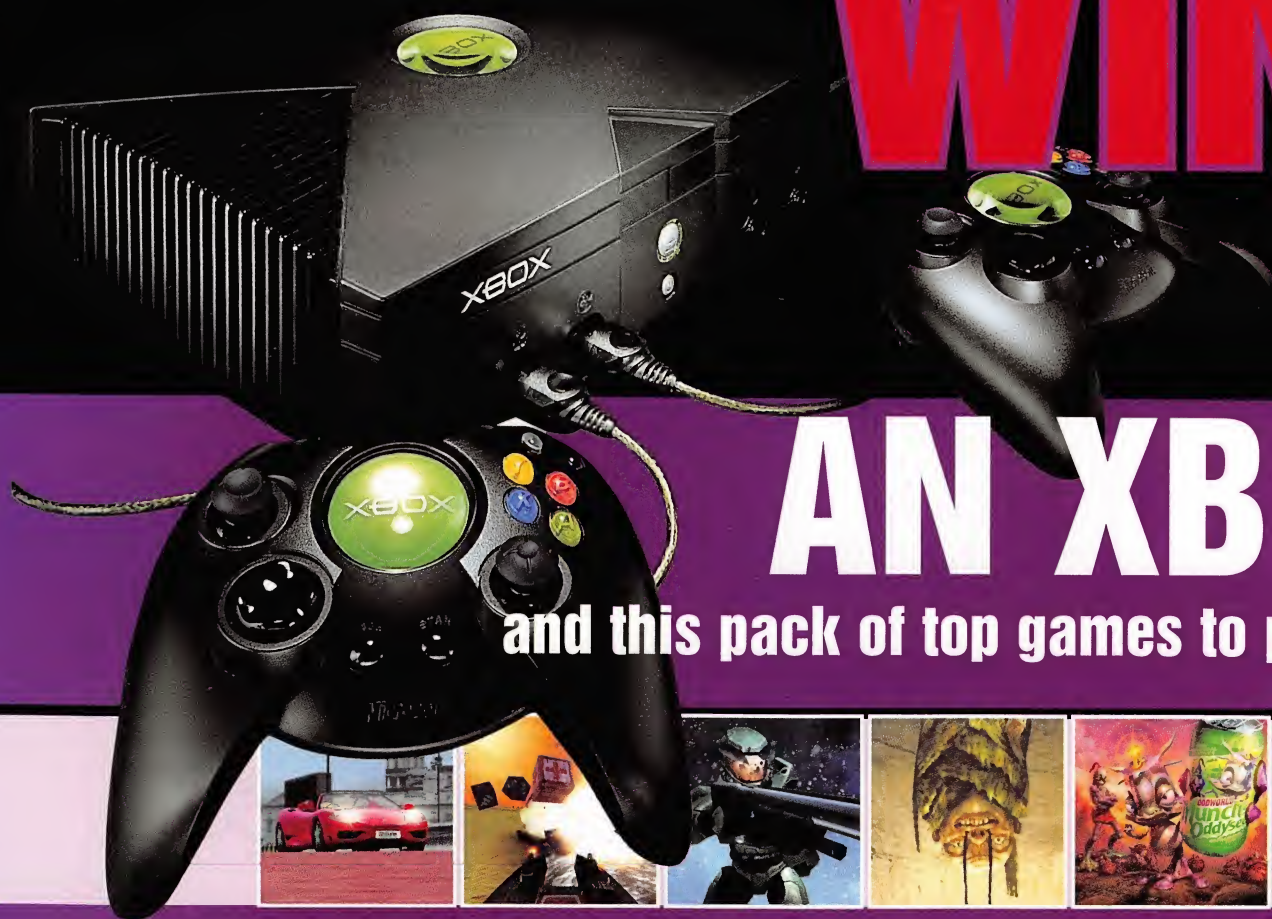


Score

Water-borne combat has definite gaming potential. Blood Wake isn't it.

69

WIN!



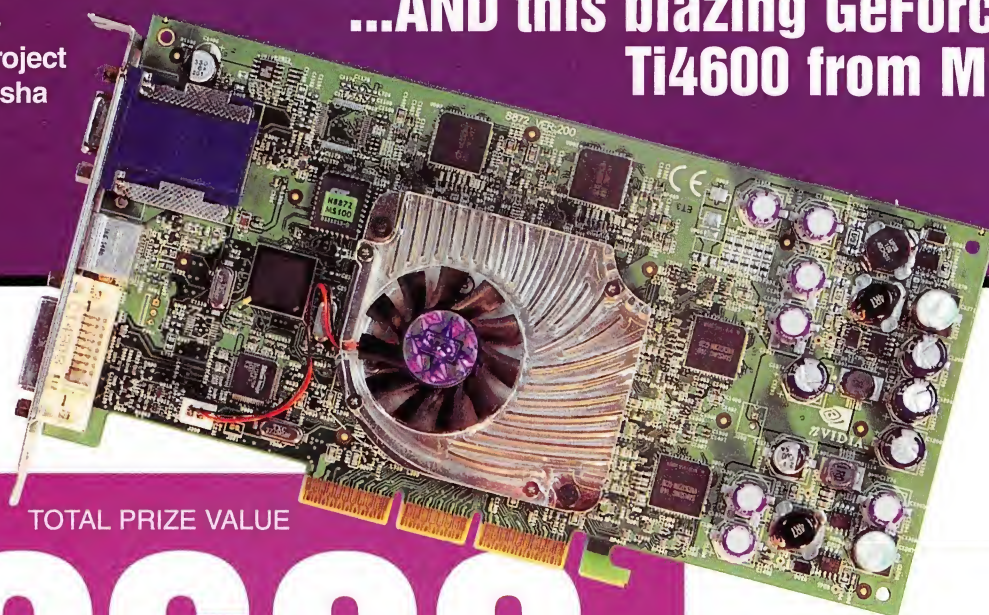
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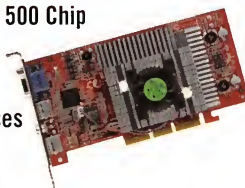
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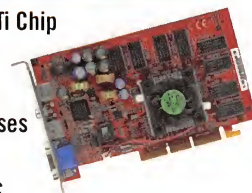
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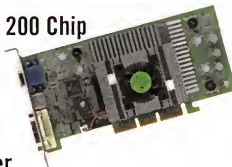
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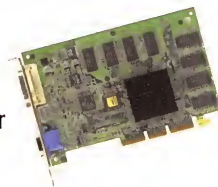
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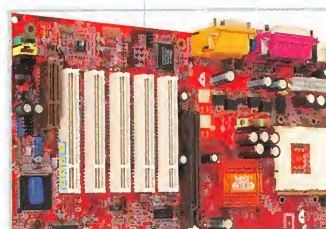
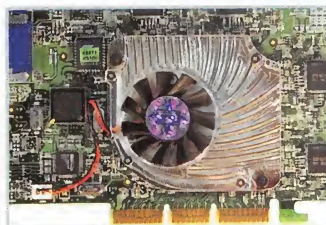
Stuff you need to make your box the Beast

Greetings all, and welcome to the Hardware section of PowerPlay. This month sees a new Technical Editor, which would be.. uh.. me. You may already know me from my work on www.overclockers.com.au, Australia's busiest PC hardware website. PCPP have invited me aboard to add more meat to this section of the mag so I hope you find it a little more to your taste this month. Also, Asher Moses joins us as a writer and if video cards are your thing we've got you covered this issue, with Asher's quick looks at the Hercules All-In-Wonder 7500 and X-Micro's GeForce4 MX400.

For those with a little more cash, I've also taken a more detailed look at the Hercules All-In-Wonder 8500DV and MSI's card based on the just-released GeForce4 Ti4600, with 128MB of memory. Sound buffs can find out all about Creative's new magic sound box, the Extigy and resident speed-freak Victor Webster takes a firm grip on the Thrustmaster Thrustbike gaming controller - I'm still miffed they didn't let me play with that one. If you've got a hot AthlonXP and nowhere to stick it, my 6-way KT266A motherboard roundup should give you some hints while on the console side of things, Daniel Wilks has been playing with a couple of X-box controllers from Saitek and Thrustmaster.

Well, you asked for a bigger hardware section and this month you've got it - pull up the comfy chair and dig in!

James Rolfe
agg@overclockers.com.au



90	MSI GeForce4 Ti
92	Hercules Radeon 8500 AIW
94	KT266A Powertest
96	SoundBlaster Extigy
98	GeForce4 MX440
	Hercules AIW 7500
100	Thrustmaster Firestorm
	Thrustmaster Freestyler
101	Saitek Adrenalin Pad



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80-89	Worthy product, which is hard to fault. May be slightly lacking in extra features, value or performance.
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40-59	Mediocre with little to recommend it.
0-39	A dog. Avoid.
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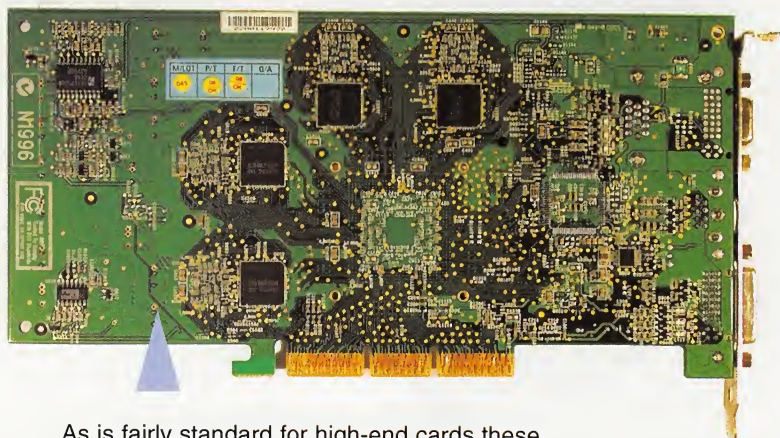
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GeForce4 Ti4600



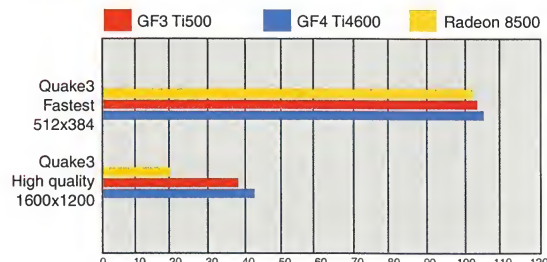
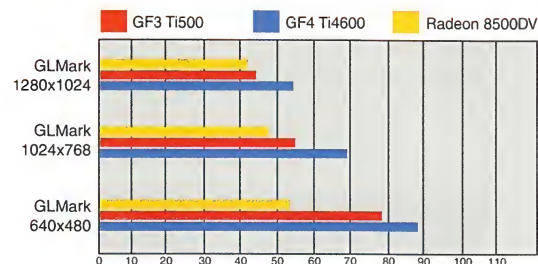
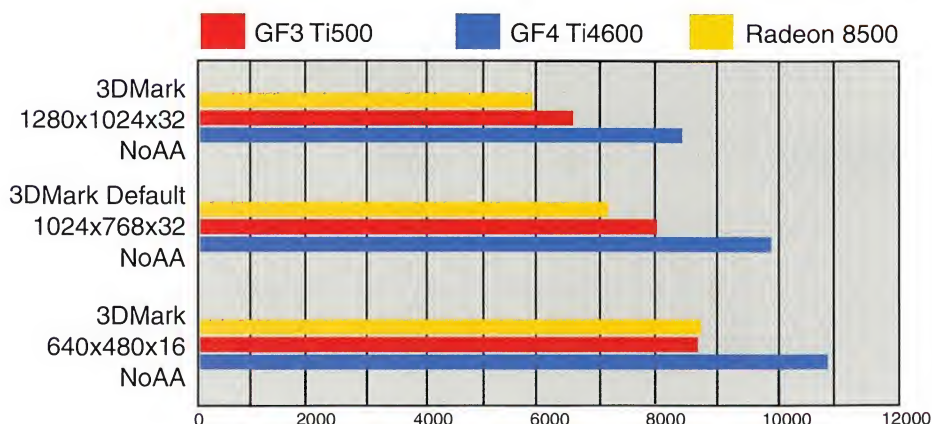
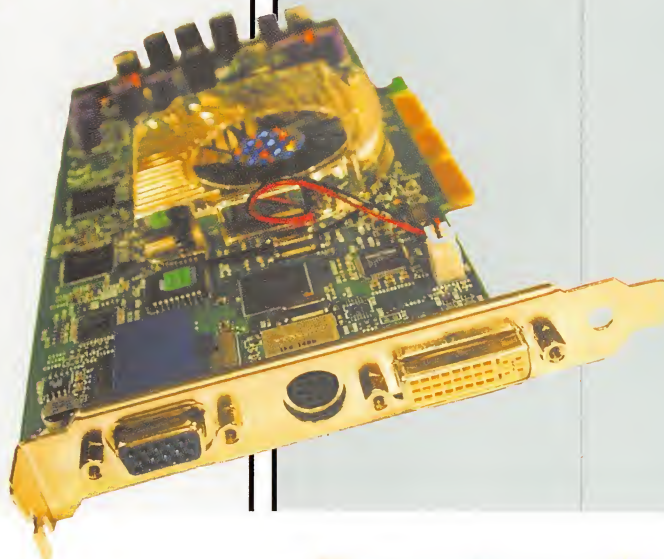
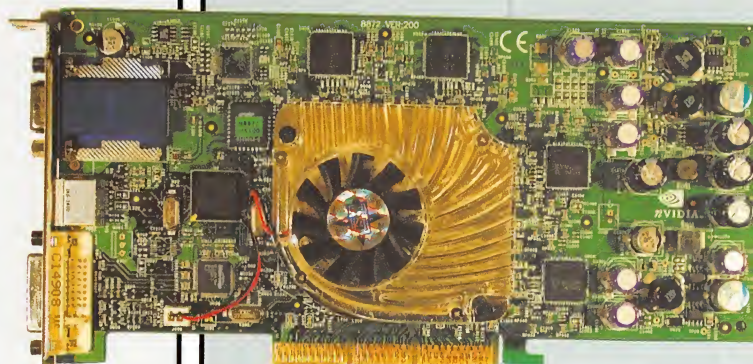
Low-fat speed

This card from MSI uses the just-released GF4 Ti4600 chipset, boasts 128MB of 650MHz DDR memory and steams along at an impressive 300MHz core speed. The previous king, GF3 Ti500, runs at a core speed of 240MHz with 500MHz memory.



As is fairly standard for high-end cards these days, this card has 3 output jacks: standard SVGA for normal monitors, DVI for digital flat panels etc and a TV-out jack for either composite or s-video.

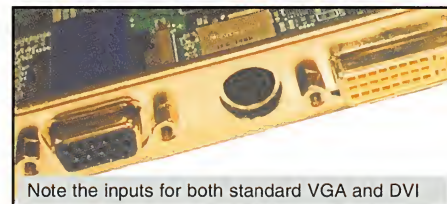
The faster things get the hotter also, generally, so it's no surprise to see another hefty cooling solution on this card. Note that the RAM, on both sides of the PCB, doesn't have heatsinks or any extra cooling at all. The Samsung RAM used is in the new BGA packaging that allows for shorter trace lengths and higher speeds with less heat. The graphics core however has a huge swirly heatsink on it with a plastic cap to keep the airflow over the heat-dissipating fins.



Performance Comparison

I'll spare you the marketing speak - I mean, if you like, I could fill pages with blurb like:

- Up to 10.4 GB/sec. memory bandwidth
- 136 million triangles/sec. setup engine
- 4.8 billion AA sample/sec. fill rate
- 1.23 trillion operations/sec.



Note the inputs for both standard VGA and DVI

Those are real specs from the GF4 Ti4600 spec sheet. What does it all mean, though? I've no idea. The only real way to tell what all of those numbers mean is to run a few benchmarks. So that's what I did, all performed on the following testbed:

- Gigabyte GA-7DXR (AMD761 + 686B) mobo
- KingMax DDR333 SDRAM (at 266MHz, CAS2)
- AMD AthlonXP 1600+ (1.4GHz)
- Quantum Fireball +KA HDD (7200rpm, ATA-66)

I compared MSI's GF4 Ti4600 with the Hercules Radeon 8500DV. Remember that the 8500DV is a slower chipset than the regular 8500 which doesn't have all the extra connectivity features of the 8500DV. I also tested the Morpheus GeForce3 Ti500, to see how the previous king of graphics processors compares.

I used reference drivers for each card - the latest official DetonatorXP drivers on NVIDIA's site, 23.11, do not support the GF4 so the latest "leaked" ones, 27.70, were used. These however failed to initialise the GF3 properly, so I used the official ones for that card. For the Radeon8500DV I used the latest drivers from ATI's site, being 6014. Testing was performed under Win2K SP2 with DirectX 8.1.

MadOnion.com's 3DMark2001SE is pretty much the de facto standard for DirectX benchmarking, so I used that to gauge the performance of each card in this popular 3D API.

3DMark2001SE is a complex benchmark with many individual demos stressing separate components of the chipset. All three cards do pretty well here, even up into the higher resolutions. At 1280x1024x32 the GF4 shows it has the most sheer grunt of the three, with the Radeon beginning to lag behind the two NVIDIA cards. Over 6000 3DMarks at that resolution shows it's no slouch, but in this company it's tough going.

The other major 3D standard is of course OpenGL. I used Lupine's GLMark, which is similar to 3DMark2001SE in that it consists of several distinct stages and uses some impressive graphics to stress the cards.

Here as the resolution increases, the results start to even out - but the GF4 Ti keeps a healthy distance from the others.

Finally, we can't forget Quake3. Although not the newest game out and therefore not using code that takes advantage of all the latest graphics chipsets, it's still a popular game, updated versions of the engine are used for more recent games and it serves as a



The RAM - there's 128Mb at 650MHz DDR

Overclocking!

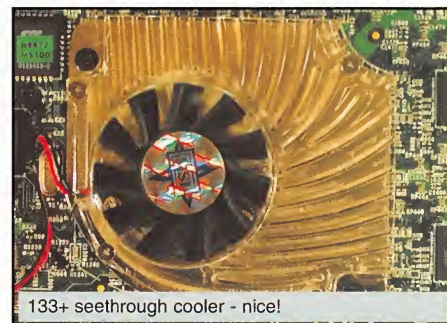
MSI's GF4 Ti4600 ships with a core (chipset) speed of 300MHz and the memory runs at 650MHz DDR. Using CoolBits, we were able to crank it up to 320/675, which resulted in a default 3DMark2001SE score of 9879, up less than 2% from stock speed.

The Hercules 3D Prophet 8500DV ships at 230/380 and, using PowerStrip, we managed to get it to 270/430 before weird things started happening. This resulted in a 3DMark2001SE score of 7148, or a 3% gain.

Both cards ran noticeably much hotter while overclocking - and they were already pretty toasty at stock speeds. You'd most likely want to consider some (warranty-voiding) aftermarket cooling if you're pushing the limits or at the very least make sure you've got decent in-case airflow happening. However, as we've found before with high-end cards, the tradeoff between heat and speed seems hardly worth it.

I did do some initial benchmarking and research into the Full-Screen Anti-Aliasing side of things, but I rapidly realised that that topic warrants a full article by itself. The range of FSAA options available with these two chipsets and the screenshots required to show the differences just can't be done justice in the space available for this article. Keep an eye out for that one!

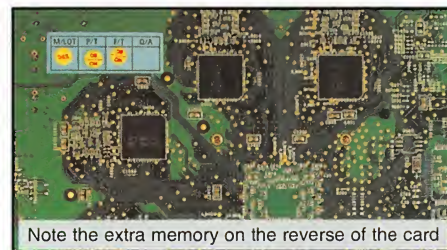
good "real world" benchmark. To make sure it's stressing the cards fully, I used a demo created by Geoff "sabretooth" Wilson for OCAU, called Slayer. Basically, it's a lot of people running around a medium-sized map and slaughtering each other. There's a lot going on all the time, it's fairly long and playing



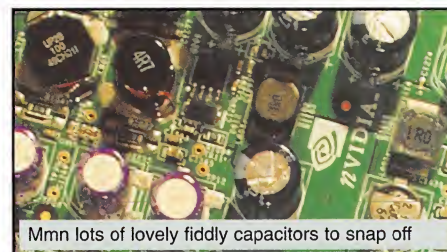
133+ seethrough cooler - nice!

it in timedemo mode really gives your machine a workout.

In the 1600x1200 test with maximum detail enabled the Radeon is utterly defeated, no doubt primarily due to the much lower memory clock than the two GeForce cards. The GF4 Ti streaks merrily on, leaving the others gasping. It pumps out over twice as many frames per second as the Radeon 8500DV, revealing the non-gaming focus of that card.



Note the extra memory on the reverse of the card



Mmn lots of lovely fiddly capacitors to snap off

In Conclusion

MSI's card based on NVIDIA's new GeForce4 Ti4600 chipset doesn't stray far from the reference design. Light on extra features but seriously quick, this is the card to have for high resolution gaming at insane frame rates. Want to own the fastest video card on the planet? Look no further.

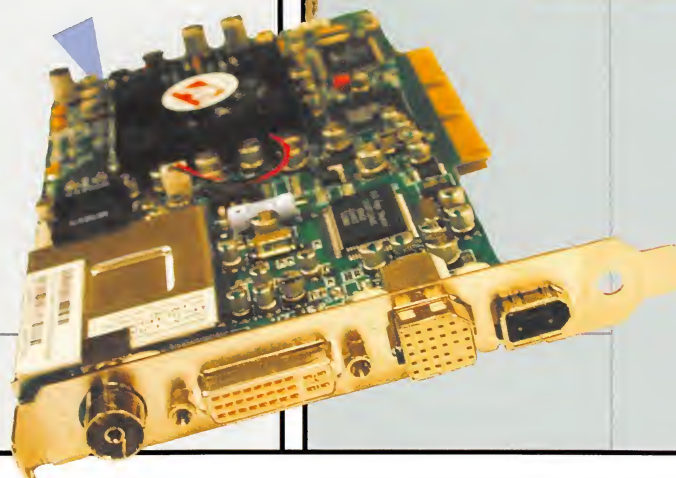
92

Hercules 3D Prophet

▶ All-In-Wonder 8500DV

Traditionally, if you wanted a way to connect lots of video inputs and outputs to your PC, you had to get some kind of highly proprietary card that was insanely expensive and not a lot of use for normal day to day desktop use, game-playing and other less specialised video card tasks. ATI have been addressing that for a fair while now with their All-In-Wonder line of cards and the latest is their 8500 DV. In fact, ATI have recently started shipping chipsets to other manufacturers so they can build cards around them, much the same way as NVIDIA do. Previously, the only way to get an ATI chipset-based card was to buy one from ATI, similar to how 3DFX used to do it. This new approach to the market from ATI seems to be going well, with a range of manufacturers producing cards for them now. One such manufacturer who already has long-standing experience and a lot of respect in the market is Hercules and today we'll be looking at their 3D Prophet All-In-Wonder 8500DV.

Like most experienced computer users, I have a pretty casual attitude when it comes to reading manuals for new products. We generally just plug in the new toy and work it out as we go. However, I'm not ashamed to admit that I took one look at the bewildering array of connectors on this new video card from Hercules and reached for the manual. I mean, at first glance, there's not even a place to plug a normal monitor in!



▶ **That initial conundrum was easily sorted** with the discovery of a little DVI-SVGA adapter in the box as well as a big breakout-box cable bristling with connectors, a VCR-style remote control and a little USB receiver for the remote.

The FireWire ports on the card are primarily intended for connecting digital video cameras etc, but can be used for a range of devices including external hard drives, MP3 players etc. You can plug your TV antenna into the card and watch normal or cable TV on your PC, with the ability to rewind back through TV you've seen to catch the good bits again. You can get Teletext, a range of info from sports to shares to weather, and captions (subtitles) on free-to-air TV. You can capture at up to 25fps in 720x576 from the inputs, be that TV or video in from a camera, VCR, Laserdisc player etc. You can play back hardware-accelerated DVD's, provided you have a DVD drive of course. Through the "HydraVision" feature, you can extend your PC's desktop across the TV as well as your monitor, giving you twice as much real estate to play with. Of course, you can use it as a normal TV-out card, playing games or surfing the net on your big-screen TV or for those

with bigger toy budgets and bigger living-rooms, a projector.

The remote is very handy and being radio-based (as opposed to infra-red) means you can have the PC in the next room so the sound of fans and DVD drives etc don't disturb your home theatre enjoyment. You can do pretty much everything from the remote, even navigating around within Windows - and you can assign custom programs to certain buttons, so you're not restricted to the standard VCR or DVD type commands. The receiver for the remote plugs into a free USB port and tucks away behind the PC.

A waking nightmare

However, where the dream begins to fall apart is with drivers and software. ATI have a reputation for problematic drivers and unfortunately that legacy continued with this card. I will say that the card I received was clearly an early sample (the plain cardboard box is always a dead giveaway), but after playing with the card for a while and trying to set up the desktop across my monitor and TV, nightmarish memories of trying to make an old 3D Rage Pro XL work under NT4, years ago, came flooding back. This isn't helped by

the absence of a printed manual - there is a full manual, but it's a PDF on CD which is difficult to get to when your PC just displays wavy lines after bootup, as happened when the drivers spontaneously decided that the TV was now the primary and only active display, despite it being turned off.

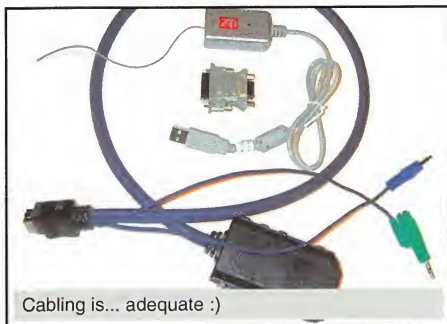
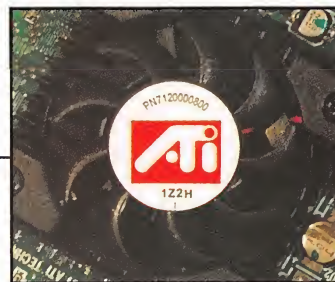
See Spot Run

The printed documentation is just a basic setup guide that doesn't go into enough depth for my liking. I think a real problem is that there is so much software included with the package - from video-chipset drivers to utilities that control each function (TV, DVD and so on) of the card, right through to VideoStudio 5, a video-editing package which is another nice inclusion. There are just so many places to change settings and options that it's frankly bewildering. I think you'd really need to sit down with a printed copy of the manual, a handful of cables and a stiff drink and spend a few evenings working out the intricacies of this beast. It's a complex, powerful device and as such is not a simple thing to master. Hopefully this will become easier as ATI's drivers and utilities mature over time. Certainly, the latest chipset drivers

Performance Comparison

They call this card the All-In-Wonder and the emphasis really is on the "All". In total the card has the following connectors:

- DVI-I (15 pin VGA adaptor included)
- Stereo audio, S-video and composite video inputs and outputs
- External stereo connection to sound card's line input and output
- Dolby(r) digital stereo audio output (S/PDIF)
- Two external IEEE 1394/iLink(tm)/FireWire(r) ports



Cabling is... adequate :)



The nifty breakout box with video inputs



The nifty remote, perfect for utter slobs

have unleashed more speed from the card, so there's hope for further improvement in terms of usability still to come.

HydraVision is pretty cool, but annoyingly buggy. You can display your desktop simultaneously on both your monitor and your TV - when you play a DVD, it appears fullscreen on the TV and windowed on the monitor. You can keep surfing the net or reading your email on the monitor - with a little occasional jerkiness in the DVD display - while watching a fullscreen movie on the TV. You can also spread the desktop across both screens like a dual-monitor system and set certain applications to appear on particular displays, but I had intermittent success with that. Sometimes it would work, but at other times it would simply ignore the fact I had chosen that mode in HydraVision, and I could see no extra settings I was changing to provoke this behaviour.

All things to all men

But in the end, despite being a home-theatre newbie, I was able to set it up and play DVD's onscreen and on my TV, record footage from the line-out on my digital camera and watch free-to-air TV channels on both screens. Using the TV-On-Demand feature I wound back and re-watched the best chair-hurling bits of Jerry Springer and even recorded the cars-flying-everywhere start of

the recent Australian F1 Grand Prix when it was shown on TV. Overall, quality seems excellent which is no great surprise as the All-In-Wonder cards have been considered the cream of home capture cards for a while now. DVD playback is smooth and clear and the included player very full-featured and easy to use. TV capture was a little grainy but I lay the blame for that squarely at the woeful reception in my area and the internal antenna I use. Recording from the composite connector again seemed limited more by my camera than the card and, again, there's no doubt more settings tucked away that would clean up the input quality.

Nice package

The included VideoStudio 5 software could easily warrant a full review itself, but essentially it lets you capture video and audio and then combine the clips using effects, voiceovers, titles etc and produce full videos. You can then output them to a range of devices in many formats. I imagine a bit of skill will go a long way, but there seem to be plenty of presets and pre-rolled effects that can have you cranking out the home movies in no time.

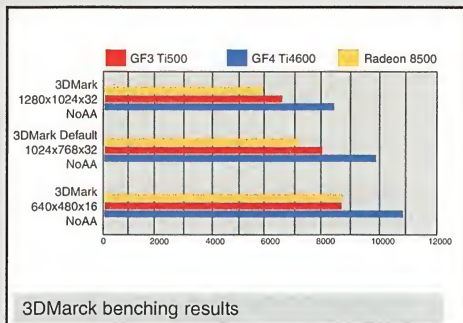
So, what we have here is a video card that boasts pretty much every feature you could want from and quite a few you probably didn't know you wanted (but after playing with for a few minutes will decide are pretty cool). It's

not all bells and whistles though, there's a pretty decent 3D chipset buried under all the extra connectors. Sure, it's pricey - but that segment of the market that buys new video cards as soon as they're released are used to not getting much change from \$1000 - and they usually don't get anywhere near as many extra goodies as this card comes with. If the video-capture, dual-display and other features are what you're after in a video card, you no longer have to abandon decent 3D performance and go to a specialised or proprietary card. A lot of fun can be had with this card, but prepare yourself for a fair amount of driver and utility frustration.

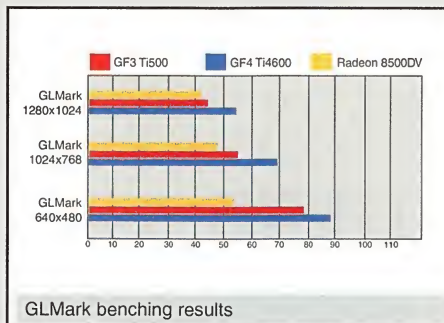
In Conclusion

This new card from Hercules boasts a daunting array of features. With more connectors than you can poke an RCA cable at, it's the perfect centrepiece for your home theatre PC. When the DVD's and digicams have been put away, it's good to know you can still fire up your favourite game and play it at impressive if not quite cutting-edge speed. Driver quirks are the only disappointment.

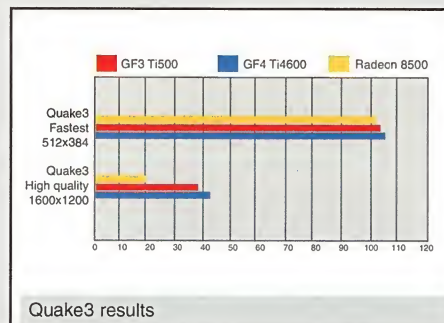
85



3DMark benchmarking results



GLMark benchmarking results

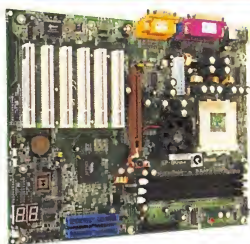


Quake3 results

KT266A POWERTEST

EPoX EP- 8KHA+

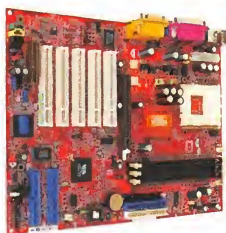
75



For a full-width board that does look fairly cluttered the EPoX disappoints in terms of extra features. On-Board sound is the unexciting AC97 and no RAID controller is present. Three fan headers and 4 USB is only average in this shootout but 6 PCI slots is nice, the EPoX being one of only two boards to provide this. The ATX power connector is in an awkward position towards the centre of the board and the unique diagnostic LED readout is handy but tucked away inside the machine once installed so of limited use. Some tall capacitors near the short end of the socket can make the installation of larger coolers and even lifting the CPU release arm fiddly. Finally, HardOCP.com recently discovered that the large capacitors near the end of the AGP slot on the EPoX will block insertion of certain video cards. Overclocking is where the EPoX board comes on strong with an excellent suite of BIOS-based adjustments available. It even lists the CPU temps, fan speeds and critical voltages on the BIOS screen during every bootup, so the paranoid can keep an eye on things. It's also one of the fastest POSTing motherboards I've seen - my monitor has barely had time to warm up and it's well into the Win2K boot. However a much-documented problem on the net involves the EPoX board hanging during a warm-boot. Even the later 2.0 revision board we used for testing here demonstrated this problem on several occasions. Once running, it was very quick and tied with the Abit for overclocking speed. Overall, the EPoX has some vocal supporters in the community and from a performance and overclocking perspective you can see why - but given the layout and other problems I'd be spending my cash elsewhere.

MSI K7T266 Pro 2-RU

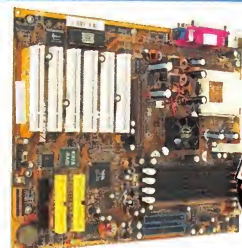
84



MSI's now-familiar red PCB appears again on this board, populated with 5 PCI slots and 3 DIMM banks for memory. For USB fans this board holds a pleasant surprise in the form of an onboard USB2.0 controller with 4 ports, giving a total of 8 USB ports for your hot-plugging pleasure. A Promise RAID controller supporting up to 4 ATA100 devices and two sets of diagnostic LED's (one set on the motherboard and another set viewable from the back of the PC) are a nice touch too. Three fan headers and AC97 onboard audio are a little below-par but bearable and ignorable respectively. Perhaps the most interesting feature is the MSI 'Smart Key', a small USB keyring that you can use to prevent the system being used in your absence. It's not going to stop a serious thief from flogging your system and resetting the CMOS to gain access, but it might stop your little brother hogging your PC. Like all the boards in this roundup the MSI is highly tweakable and very fast. MSI make a big deal of their in-Windows BIOS update and Fuzzy Logic automatic-overclocking software but we found the board only stable to 160MHz FSB, which is less than most others here, and the BIOS only allows a maximum of 164MHz to be selected as compared to 200MHz on other boards. However, the MSI fared well in the benchmarking. If USB 2.0 is what you're after, this board is a pretty solid choice.

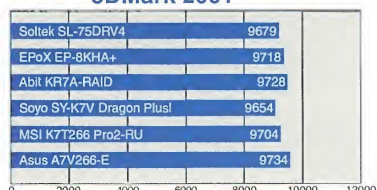
Abit KR7A-RAID

90

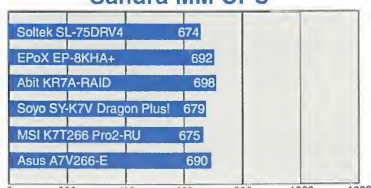


Long the darlings of the overclocking set, Abit haven't dissatisfied with this board. The only board sporting 4 DIMM banks and one of only two with 6 PCI slots, the KR7A-RAID also squeezes in a HighPoint HPT372 ATA133 RAID controller with 2 IDE headers. Abit have continued their tradition of SoftMenu, moving all the tweaking and overclocking options into the BIOS instead of jumpers or switchblocks on the motherboard. They have also ditched any on-board sound, sensibly assuming their target market will be forking out for a real sound card anyway. In terms of layout the Abit fares well, the power cable will likely run over the RAM banks which is a little fiddly but no great drama. There's plenty of room to the sides of the socket but at the lug ends things are a little tight with some capacitors at the bottom and the socket very close to the top of the board, meaning in a minitower case the power supply could make attaching and removing a socket cooler awkward. Four fan headers, 4 USB ports, diagnostic LED's on the board and protective stickers under the CPU socket lugs round out the board nicely. Also in the newly redesigned briefcase-style box are some black cables, (two ATA66 and one floppy), 2-port USB backplate and a floppy disk with the Promise drivers. An unusual inclusion is 3 large blue cable-ties for keeping the inside of your machine tidy. Finally, a CD containing Norton AntiVirus 2002 and the ubiquitous hardware monitor and Acrobat Reader software is included as well. This board tied with the EPoX for maximum overclocking speed, has a huge range of tweaking options in the BIOS and, despite being a little pricey, it's our favourite for performance and features.

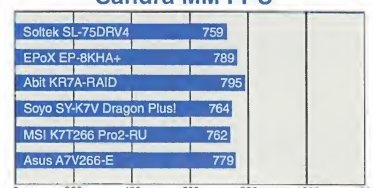
3DMark 2001



Sandra MM CPU



Sandra MM FPU



All boards here boast excellent overclocking features in the BIOS, with a full range of multipliers and FSB adjustment. Due to time constraints we were unable to test each board to the exact MHz of FSB overclocking it would endure, but we got to the nearest 5MHz increment. The clear winners are Abit and EPoX and it seems they are pretty much even in terms of FSB overclocking, but the Abit board allows a 5x multiplier while the EPoX only goes down to 6x. This means of course that with the Abit we could use a higher FSB to reach our test CPU's core limit. I doubt many people will be running such low multipliers these days so it's unlikely to be that big an issue.

Asus A7V266-E

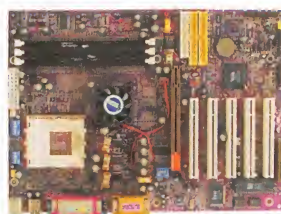
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In this company the Asus looks almost boring, with traditional brownish printed circuit board (PCB) and white PCI slots. No RAID controller is present but clearly marked on the PCB are spaces for a Promise chip and 2 IDE headers. There's no separate product name for the RAID-equipped board, it's just listed as an option on their website. Anyway, the board has 5 PCI slots, one of which shares space with a CMR slot (which looks like an offset and reversed PCI slot). You and I will never use this slot, but OEM builders can use it to slap in a cheap soundcard or modem and, given that much of Asus' huge market share is due to their OEM sales, Asus are unlikely to drop that kind of feature anytime soon. Speaking of sound, the Asus has the CMI 6-channel chip onboard with backplate connectors. This is a better choice in terms of sound quality and features than the woeful AC97 seen elsewhere but will be ignored by many in favour of a PCI sound card. Four fan headers and 4 USB ports together with under-lug socket protection keep it on par with the others and there is plenty of room around the CPU socket in all directions with only the RAM slots being a possible cause for concern. One strange feature is the unique Palomino vs Athlon/Duron jumper block, which none of the other boards require but on the Asus you MUST set correctly for your CPU or the board won't start. The Asus won by a small margin in all benchmarks and we found it adequate for overclocking but ultimately overshadowed by the EPoX and Abit.

Soltek SL-75DRV4

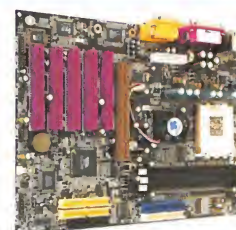
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The Soltek is another board dressed to shock, with a bright purple PCB. The layout is mostly good with the power connector tucked away nicely on the edge of the board and the RAM slots not blocked by a card in the AGP slot (a pet peeve of mine, the Soltek is the only board to not have this problem.) There's plenty of space around the socket except for one large capacitor which really gets in the way and to my mind totally spoils the layout. I'd be surprised if a large cooler like the Swiftech MCX462 would be usable on this board due to the placement of that capacitor. Also, the IDE connectors are too close to the end of the AGP slot for my liking. Anyway, the board is protected by under-lug stickers which is nice, Soltek have included a remote thermal diode cable which some will find handy and the software bundle is excellent, including PartitionMagic, Drivelmage, PCCillin and VirtualDrive. AC97 audio is again unexciting and the familiar 5 PCI slots, 3 DIMM banks and 4 fan headers are by now standard features for KT266A boards. There's no RAID controller but the Soltek wins points by being the only board to use the new VIA 8233A SouthBridge chip, giving it native ATA133 support on the normal IDE ports. All the other boards use the 8233 (no A) which allows only ATA100. However, it'll be a while before ATA100 starts to impact performance so this is of debatable real-world value. Soltek have a Red Storm auto-overclocking system in the BIOS that I don't place a lot of value on - it picked laughably low limits for a test CPU and, being BIOS-based, can't test many of the components to failure anyway. This board fared reasonably well in manual overclocking but in terms of features doesn't stack up to the others.

Soyo SY-K7V Dragon Plus

82

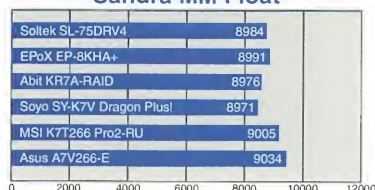


Another unusual-looking board with black PCB and purple PCI slots, the Soyo packs a lot of features in. As well as the Promise ATA100 RAID we've seen on a few other boards the Soyo has a focus on sound, with a separate backplate providing SPDIF and digital optical input/output jacks. These will let you connect the PC to serious home-theatre gear and take advantage of the 6-channel sound. Finding out of this is worthwhile due to the onboard sound quality is left as an exercise for the reader. It's also the only board here with an on-board Ethernet adapter. A bizarre inclusion is a smartcard-reader in a bay that connects to the motherboard with a thin ribbon cable. I can't imagine a home user having any use for this, unless they work out how to recharge phone cards with them or some other nefarious purpose. The Soyo's layout is not too bad, but large capacitors near the socket make heatsink installation fiddly, like on the EPoX board. Five fan headers is a welcome inclusion and the BIOS has a wealth of overclocking and tweaking options - but the Soyo wasn't as overclockable as the Abit and EPoX. Also, while the differences between all the boards were very small, it has to be noted that the Soyo was the slowest across all the benchmarks. You could happily choose this board if the specific extra features appeal to you but it's not the king of the KT266A hill.

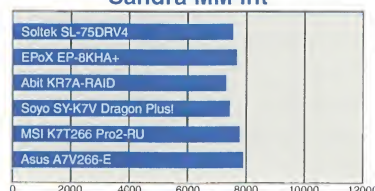
Conclusions:

When testing a group of motherboards based upon the same chipset, it's not too surprising to find performance pretty much identical across the whole range. The differences we've observed here, literally only a few percent, will easily be overcome with BIOS revisions or some more careful tweaking of the setup. No doubt some of you with very specific needs will have already singled out the Soyo for its smartcard reader or sound hardware. People demanding the highest overclocking ability will reach for the Abit or EPoX. For my money, I'd pick the Abit. ATA133 RAID, 4 DIMM banks, 6 PCI slots and an excellent overclocker to boot - very worthy of our PCPP Power Award.

Sandra MM Float



Sandra MM Int



Creative

SoundBlaster Extigy

Creative really sprung this product on everyone - I remember the confusion that greeted its announcement a couple of months ago. Recently there's been a few sound cards that come with external or in-bay boxes with extra connectors etc, from Creative and some other manufacturers. But the Extigy is a bit of an oddity, in that it's a sound card with no card.. just the box. You don't need to install a card at all, in fact, you just plug the box into a free USB port and away you go.

Empty box?

Not a lot lurks within the packaging, just a plug-pack transformer, the USB cable, a CD full of software, the infra-red remote control and of course, the Extigy itself. Looking like a biggish external modem, the Extigy has little feet that let you stand it on end or lay it flat. The front and back are bristling with audio connectors of all kinds.

So you could receive the audio from DVD or CD players, VCR's, MIDI keyboards and game consoles etc, and output to a 5.1 digital speaker system, conventional stereo speakers, MD recorder, a home theatre or stereo amplifier. Of course, you can also send it audio data from your PC via the USB connection.

Creative note that it's perfect for laptops or notebooks and that's true, but don't go thinking they mean it's portable. Sure, laptops usually have woeful sound onboard and this will work on most with a USB port, but you'd need to lug around speakers (and power them somehow) not to mention the 12v power-pack the Extigy itself requires. Taking your laptop on the run then coming home and plugging it into the Extigy on your desk is more what I suspect they had in mind.

Setup was a doddle - plugging

the unit into a USB port and turning it on resulted in Win2K quietly installing it as a "USB Audio device" - which I assume equates to USB speakers, because I could immediately play music through speakers connected to the Extigy. To get the full functionality of the unit you need to install the drivers and software from the CD. This again was painless although it does offer to install RealPlayer and a few other not-entirely-relevant things. In terms of applications, you get a typical mixer application, a sound recorder that lets you use the Extigy's many inputs, a program to write your music to MiniDisc, an internet radio player and "MixMaster" mp3 mixing software. There are utilities for the various EAX effects and sound-manipulating features of the Extigy including the usual "concert hall" distortions and a useful audio noise-removal tool.

Searching on the net reveals some complaints about software problems, but I didn't have any so perhaps Creative have addressed those issues now. Most complaints seem to be from people with slower PCs - it seems that Creative's stated minimum requirement of a P2-350MHz was a little optimistic.

Sweet to the ear

Sound quality seems very good. I'm no audiophile and don't have racks of reference sound-monitoring gear, but I do have a set of fairly decent Koss StudioPro headphones. This kind of stuff is always extremely subjective, but playing CDs and MP3s through these is noticeably clearer and flatter on the Extigy than the Sound Blaster Live! that normally inhabits this PC.

There was a lot of concern when this product was announced, about the USB connection to the PC. It's only



USB 1.0, which offers less bandwidth than FireWire or the newer USB 2.0. Also, USB controllers can sometimes take up a lot of CPU time which had gamers concerned about using the Extigy on a gaming PC. I tested it on my system using an Asus A7V motherboard. This has the USB controller within the (VIA686A) South Bridge chip, as many motherboards will. I ran a few timedemos in Quake3 at high and low resolution and when using the Extigy I got between 10 and 15% less FPS than with the SoundBlaster Live! PCI card. On the Duron 900MHz with Leadtek GeForce3 card, it didn't have a noticeable effect,

visually, on a few other games I played at my normal settings. Using my USB scanner at the same time as gaming or playing MP3s didn't make the sound skip or cut out either.

An interesting external soundcard gadget from Creative, the Extigy allows you to connect a huge number of audio devices to your laptop, desktop PC or game console. The USB connection gives a slight performance hit, but the sound quality, features and sheer convenience will warrant a closer look from all but the most focused hardcore gamer.

James Rolfe

Price: \$399

Distributor: Creative Labs

URL: australia.creative.com

Phone: 02 9666 6500

Not for the hardcore who worry about CPU cycles, but still an impressive sound device

SCORE

89

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www.asus.com

X-Micro

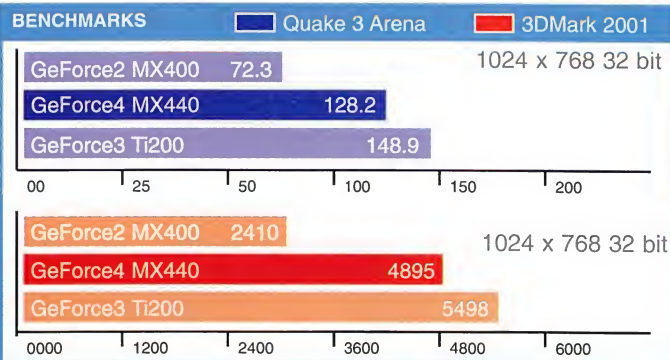
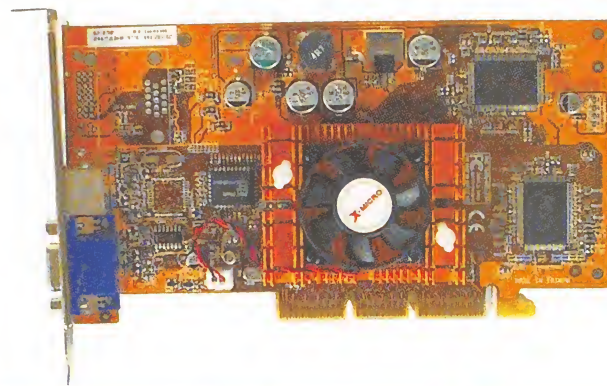
GeForce4 MX440

This is the second

GeForce4 card to hit our labs - the X-Micro GeForce4 MX440, which runs at a core clock speed of 275MHz and features 64MB DDR RAM that runs at 400MHz. Unlike the GeForce3/GeForce4 Ti range, the GeForce4 MX series is based on the NV17 core, and thus does not include programmable vertex/pixel shaders. So basically, the GeForce4 MX is just an advanced version of the GeForce2 MX. However, there are quite a few features that the GeForce4 MX has that its predecessor doesn't. These include the GeForce4's advanced crossbar memory controller, the new Accuvivew anti-aliasing technology, nVidia's nView technology (multiple monitor support) and a video processing engine (hardware

DVD playback). The X-Micro GeForce4 MX440 card also features a TV output that supports resolutions of up to 1024x768, however, current televisions only support a maximum of 800x600, with some maxing out at 640x480. In our benchmarks, the GeForce3 Ti200 outperformed The X-Micro GeForce4 MX440 by a reasonable amount, while the GeForce4 MX440 outperformed its predecessor, the GeForce2 MX400 by more than 50% in both benchmarks. Taking into consideration the fact that the GeForce4 MX440 is about \$100 cheaper than the GeForce3 Ti200, if you're on a budget and looking for a new video card for gaming purposes, make sure you consider the X-Micro GeForce4 MX440.

Asher Moses



Price: \$230

Distributor: Altech

URL: www.altech.com.au

Phone: 02 9748 2233

Great performance at an excellent price. Only let down by its lack of programmable vertex/pixel shaders

SCORE

83

Hercules

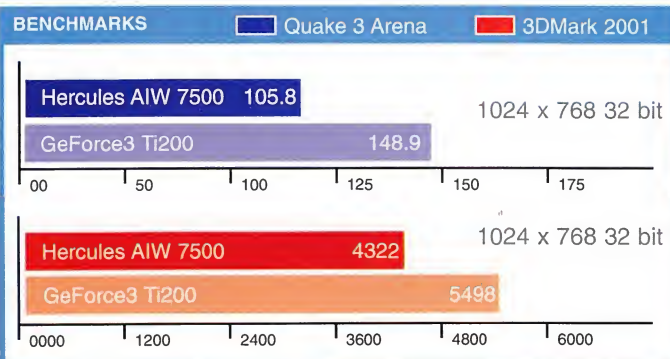
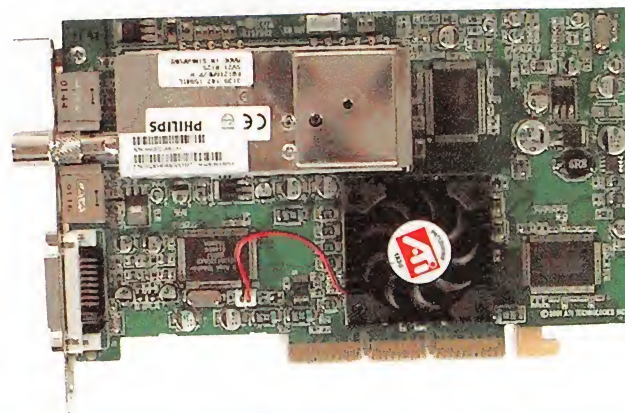
All-In-Wonder 7500

One of the latest video

cards to hit the PC PowerPlay labs is the Hercules All-In-Wonder 7500. This card is packed with features such as a TV tuner, DVI output, TV output (maximum resolution 1024x768), Dolby AC-3 digital output, S-Video input, Composite video input and audio input. The card is based on the ATi Radeon 7500 (RV200) core, which runs at 260MHz, and features 64MB DDR RAM that runs at 360MHz. The card features a DVI output for digital flat panel monitors however, a DVI-to-VGA converter is included for those of you that own CRT monitors. All of the card's input/output connectors are placed on a separate adapter that can be stuck to your desk using the provided adhesive pads for easy access. The package also comes with an

optional RF remote control that comes with a receiver that connects to your computer's USB port. The onboard TV tuner provided quite decent image quality, albeit not as good as a regular television but definitely tolerable. One thing that you should take into consideration when reading the benchmark results is that the card was not designed to compete with the high-end 3D cards on the market, and is mainly directed at people who will frequently use the multimedia features included on the card. The All-In-Wonder 7500 provides satisfactory 3D performance for the occasional gamer and at \$549, it may be out of reach for some of you, but you won't be able to find a video card with the same feature-set for such a low price.

Asher Moses



Price: \$200

Distributor: Hercules

URL: au.hercules.com

Phone: 02 8303 1818

Decent 3D performance for the occasional gamer and an excellent multimedia feature-set.

SCORE

79

X - MICRO

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- Memory Speed 446MHz
- Memory Speed 4nS
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- Triangle per sec. 31 Million

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- Memory Speed 183MHz
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Thrustmaster

Firestorm XBOX Gamepad

Once again Thrustmaster has managed to release one of the best third party peripherals for a system. Renowned for their excellent PC controllers, Thrustmaster has based the shape of their first Xbox controller around their Firestorm gamepads whilst keeping the consoles button configuration. The tried and true design looks good and feels great in the hand allowing for easy access to all of the buttons, analogue sticks and D-pad without any discomfort. As an added feature the pad is fully programmable, allowing users to map keys to their personal preference.

Whilst the button configuration is by and large the same as on the standard controller, Thrustmaster has spaced the buttons slightly further apart to make for easier control. The design works very well for button

intensive games such as Tony Hawk 3 or Genma Onimusha where speed and precision are of vital importance. The Analogue sticks and D-pad offer a good degree of resistance and precision though the D-pad does clunk a bit whilst in use. This is no real problem but it may take a little while to get used to the feel before it feels natural.

On the downside the triggers on the controller are very sensitive, activating at the slightest touch which can cause some serious problems when things get hot and heavy (not in a sexual way). If you're a particularly ham-fisted gamer (like yours truly) it will take quite a while to get used to. In the next Thrustmaster Xbox gamepad it would be nice to see a new and more intuitive button configuration but until then the



Firestorm Programmable Gamepad is a good alternative to the standard controller. It also doesn't hurt that the pad comes in at \$10 less than its Microsoft counterpart.

Daniel Wilks

Price: \$59.95

Distributor: Thrustmaster

URL: au.thrustmaster.com

Phone: 8303 1818

SCORE

A good alternative to the standard pad but still plagued with the standard XBOX buttons

87

Thrustmaster

Freestyler Bike

Thrustmaster gained initial recognition through their steering wheels - products that received instant acclaim from the legions of racing simulator fans in the US. With this backing, Thrustmaster were well qualified to tackle the daunting task of producing the first believable motorbike controller, and - despite the obvious complications - they've done a superb job.

There are two possible ways to arrange the Freestyler Bike: with a funny little seat, so you sit on it and the handlebars rest between your legs, or - in a more conventional manner - it can be fastened to a desk. Sitting on the Freestyler Bike is reminiscent of riding a piwi-50 as a small child. Needless to say, this is not the desired sensation when blasting around a racetrack at break-neck speed. I spent the vast majority

of my playing time with it fastened to my desk.

The Freestyler Bike has two different settings, GP (grand Prix/road bike) Mode and Cross (dirt bike) Mode. Using GP mode, the motorcycle is controlled by "leaning" the handlebars to one side, while in Cross Mode the handlebars are turned either to the right or left. The two axes work independently, so it would be possible for future games to recognize both the leaning and turning axis simultaneously. There is also a third axis for throttle, located on the right hand-grip, just like a real motorbike. The controller also has brake and clutch levers, in addition to eight buttons and an eight-way directional pad. On a real motorbike, a foot pedal controls the rear brake - an



easily feasible feature that is unfortunately missing.

The Freestyler Bike feels surprisingly authentic. Both modes (GP and Cross) are fantastic fun, especially when used with games supporting an

on-bike camera view.

Obviously, it can't compare to riding a real motorcycle, but the Freestyler Bike makes a brave and unexpectedly convincing first attempt.

Victor Webster

Price: \$149

Distributor: Thrustmaster

URL: au.thrustmaster.com

Phone: 02 8303 1818

SCORE

Anyone who loves motorcycle games will benefit from the Freestyler Bike, it comes highly recommended.

84

Saitek

XBOX Adrenalin Pad

It's standard practice to start

a review of any product with the good points, introducing the merits of the device thereby cushioning the blow that comes when the bad points are announced. Unfortunately the only good thing that can be said about the first Saitek Xbox gamepad is that it is available - not that you'd want to buy one. The controller itself looks quite appealing with an attractive black, green and silver colour screen but as soon as you get the thing in your hands all or the many and various flaws come to light.

One of the major gripes against the standard Xbox controller is that the buttons are placed far too close together to be any good. Saitek combats this problem by placing the buttons even closer together, so close in fact that all of the six

face buttons can be simultaneously pressed by one human sized thumb. Whilst this may be good for some as yet unproduced game where all of the buttons need to be pressed in order to pull off some special move it is no good in normal gaming. Anything requiring precision button pressing is next to unplayable. To compound the button problems the triggers are very squishy and quite uncomfortable.

Worse again are the analogue sticks and D-pad. The sticks are very soft, uncomfortable and quite unresponsive as well as looking flimsy enough to break after one serious gaming session. The less said about the D-pad the better except to mention that it is uncomfortable, dull and has such a small range of movement that it allows for



little fine control. Overall the Saitek Adrenalin Pad is a poor excuse for a controller, offering little in the way of usability and less in the way of comfort. A very poor effort.

Daniel Wilks

Price: \$50 approx.

Distributor: Innovision

URL: www.innovision.com.au

Phone: 03 5831 8833

A poor performing and flimsy feeling controller that makes the standard XBOX pad look like a work of genius.

SCORE

39

GAME GLASSES

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THE BEAST

THE MOST POWERFUL GAMING PC GOOD MONEY CAN BUY

This month was the climax of a long wait - it saw the invasion of the ultra-fast, super-sexy GeForce4 Ti4600. It's so fast it leaves everything else eating dust and still remains at the upper reaches of affordability. What would the Beast be without it? Nothing, just a pale shell.

CPU, MEMORY AND MOTHERBOARD

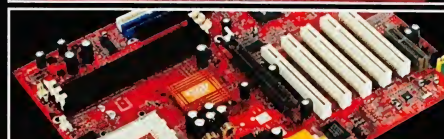
AMD Athlon XP 2000+

So fast it can process data before you even ask, that's how fast it is, and cheap too. \$750 www.amd.com



MSI K7T266PRO2-RU

Three months on from the review and the thing is still on top as far as AMD CPU motherboards goes. It's red, so it must go faster. \$350 www.msicomputer.com.au



512MB Odin 300MHz RAM

What's so special about this RAM? Well, it operates at 300MHz, faster than any other DDR RAM on the market, that's what. \$450 www.3dpower.com



Thermaltake Volcano 7

Cold as hell and smart enough to know how cold to make it. \$57 www.anyware.com.au



Topower 420w PSU

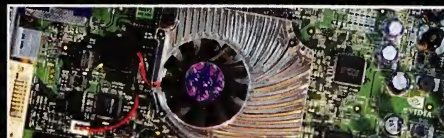
Gold in look, gold in performance. \$182 www.techbuy.com.au



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Creative Audigy Platinum XP

Still the best, most powerful soundcard imaginable. It's going to be a while before Creative is kicked off the top of the sound card pile. \$599 www.creative.com.au



BA Digital Theatre 6000

Combined with the Audigy you've got yourself a high end stereo in your PC. \$1399 www.bostonacoustics.com



Sony MDR-F1 Headphones

The gold plated Rolls Royce of headphones, powerful, sexy and oh so comfortable. \$649 www.sony.com.au



Hercules DV Action

Fast cheap and good for video editing. \$199 <http://au.hercules.com>

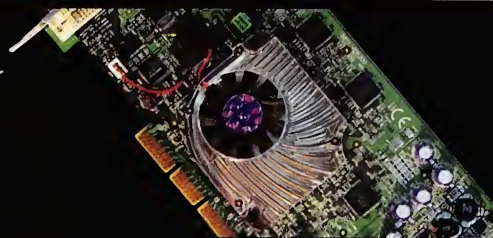


LATEST ADDITION

GeForce4 Ti4600

www.msicomputer.com.au
\$925

How could we have a Beast without the most powerful video card that we've seen so far? We couldn't. It wouldn't be fair to you to skip where it most counts so this month the Beast welcomes the inclusion of the MSI GeForce4 Ti460, the card we have taken to calling the bitchin' fast 3D.



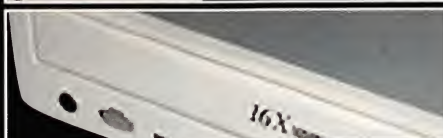
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A good solid SCSI for a big fast HDD.
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PHYSICALITY AND INPUT

Diamondtron 2060u 22" Monitor

It's larger than life, crisp and has a beautifully short tube.
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**Lian Li PC-60 ATX Aluminium Case**

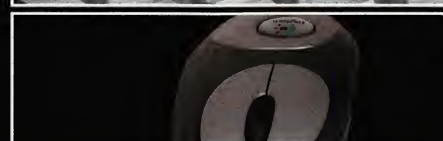
So sexy it hurts. Solid, smooth and full of space. It's been on the Beast for a while and will stay for a while yet.
\$396 www.anyware.com.au

**Microsoft Internet Keyboard**

Looks slick and can keep the WASD action going all day. A great performer for twice the price.
\$49 www.gamedude.com.au

**Logitech Mouseman Dual Optical**

The best gaming mouse on the market bar none. So accurate it hurts.
\$99.95 www.logitech.com

**Microsoft Sidewinder Force-Feedback**

Great feeling stick with real bite.
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**Logitech Momo Force**

The swankiest racing wheel on the market bar none.
\$499 www.logitech.com



TOTAL BEAST VALUE:

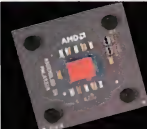
\$12000



BEASTIE

Athlon XP 1600

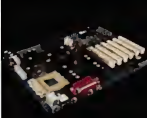
So fast it you might miss it but at a price you can't ignore.
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Sound and USB ports on face, PSU and great style combined with excellent price and ample elbow room make this on a winner. \$132

**Hercules XPS 210**

Powerful sub and satellite speaker combo sound great and looks incredibly swanky.
\$119



TOTAL BEASTIE VALUE

\$20000

Mod Life

When out of the box just ain't enough

Quake III Arena Bid For Power

Last year a much-anticipated mod, Balance of Power was put on hiatus when the mod team was threatened with legal action for the illegal use of DBZ characters in the game. Well, it's time to rejoice because the mod has finally been released, sans incriminating evidence. Was it worth the extra wait? Hell yes. Bid for Power is an absolute hoot, putting a whole new spin on Quake III and shooters in general. Instead of the general array of weapons found in most shooters, BFP features a range of Ki attacks and other spell-like abilities with which you can atomize your foes.

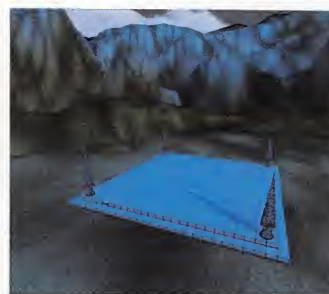
At the start of the game players are limited to five spell-like abilities at a relatively low power level. At each successive power level reached through fragging enemies the aura of the character changes, giving enemies an idea of how powerful the character is and giving the character more attacks and powers to choose from. The more kills earned the higher the power level becomes and the more powers the player has access to. Each attack utilises Ki, a rechargeable power supply - when you run out of Ki you'd better find a safe place to hide because you can't do any-



thing else whilst recharging. You can't move, shoot or in any way protect yourself.

The anime styling of Bid for Power looks fantastic and all the character and power animations are top notch. Sound effects are also very atmospheric and effective, conveying the cartoonish nature of the mod well. Different gameplay modes available include; a standard every man for himself style deathmatch, capture the flag, team last man standing, a one on one tournament mode

in which only 2 players fight whilst all others act as spectators and a survival mode. Bid for Power may have lost some of its DBZ flavour, it still smells as sweet. It may be a big download but it's definitely worth it.



4/5

For: Blah

Version: Quake III Arena

Size: 100Mb

URL: <http://www.bidforpower.com/>



For: Quake III Arena

Invasion

It's good to see a sci-fi themed mod that goes back to its roots by pitting the heroic forces of mankind Vs. alien scum. Based around a simple CTF formula the mod sees the Marine team charged with the task of stealing an Alien egg whilst the Alien team are charged with stopping them.

4/5



For: Quake III Arena

Niflheim - Soul Feast

Though the mod is only in the demo stages, Niflheim - Soul Feast pits armies of magic wielding demons Vs. chubby and seemingly innocuous Cherubs. Playing like a mixture of standard deathmatch and capture the soul, Niflheim features all new character skins, levels, weapons and a huge assortment of magic spells.

4/5

Unreal Tournament Strike Force

It looks like there could be another potential Counter-Strike killer in the making with the beta release of Strike Force, an exceptional realistic combat, Terrorists Vs. Counter Terrorists mod for Unreal Tournament. New features include new player models, levels, weapons, game styles, physics, damage and there's even talk of active voice comms in a future release. The mod team has truly gone all out with the new weapons, with six SMGs, 7 assault rifles, 4 sniper rifles, 4 shotguns, 8 pistols and heap of other goodies. If you like your multiplayer combats fast, furious and as real as possible than look no further. Strikeforce provides.

With a back-story that contains all of the usual rhetoric about heroic Americans having the crap bombed out of them by some nasty terrorist guys and the UN special forces team, Strikeforce being sent in to help, Strikeforce casts player as either Strikeforce members or terrorists in a battle for supremacy. Gameplay, whilst reminiscent of Counter-Strike has enough individual flourishes to make it stand out as a game in it's own right rather than just a pale imitator. The most notable new feature is the pulse indicator - a quasi-health monitor that effects the



game in a number of small ways. Characters can run for a short while but it increases their pulse rate. When the pulse reaches 100 or above the character will begin to breathe loudly, making them easier to hear. The higher the pulse the more inaccurate the weapon. Many factors can cause the heartbeat to spike, from encumbrance to damage, running, and jumping.

The mod supports a number of game types ranging from the standard CTF to Assault, Escape,

Team Deathmatch, Deathmatch, Jailbreak, Capture and hold, Hostage Rescue and Cargo Protection. Strikeforce is a big (huge) download at 266Mb plus a 66Mb patch, so unless you have a broadband connection it may take you quite a while to suck this baby down. It's worth it though.



4/5

For: Unreal Tournament

Version: 1.70

Size: 266Mb (+66Mb Upgrade)

URL: www.strikeforcecenter.com

For: Rogue Spear

Renegade Legion

Set in the far flung future, Renegade Legion, a new TC mod for Rogue Spear casts players as soldiers in a newly brewed war of rebellion. Featuring single and multi-player modes, Renegade Legion is one of the most professional looking mods out there luckily gameplay is just as good.

5/5



For: Half-Life

Timeline 1, 2 & 3

Through three different mod packs Gordon fights his way through the war torn past (now with Nazis), an icy alternate earth and a present day where things just aren't quite right. As far as single player HL mods go, Timeline is just about perfect. Give it a go and try to save the future.

5/5

INBOX



LOTM wins the knee trembling AMD Athlon TM processor 1500+ with QuantiSpeed™ architecture! The ultimate gaming CPU! Blistering framerates! Awesome responsiveness! And an attractive sort of Brown/ Orange PCB! Autumn colours are in, dontcherknow!

Be sure to include your name and postal address with your letter.

BEYOND THE BOX

Now here is a scary thought - there ARE other games out there than just the ones that you can find at your local Electronics Boutique, there ARE games that don't come in boxes, and there ARE games that people spend a lot of time in development that never get sold on the shelves.

I am talking about Browser-based games, available only on the Internet. An example of this is a game called Planetarion (www.planetarion.com), a Real Time Strategy game, based in a Universe consisting of around 60 000 people worldwide. With 49 different ships, and so many people vying for universal domination, it has the same winning combination that is often found in games that are reviewed between the covers of your magazine.

I am surprised to see that a gaming magazine of such quality as yours finds it unnecessary to write articles about such a popular type of game. I would be elated if your magazine set a standard for all other PC gaming magazines around Australia/New Zealand to bring recognition to such games that do not receive due credit and their deserved publicity - and of course, your excellent reviews!

I Rourke
Perth WA

We shall endeavour to mend our ways...

MAD AT MY BOX

Like a few people said "GeForce 4 is in sight but where are the games?" That is absolutely right but its not just graphic cards its EVERYTHING. At least 80% of gamers currently own a PC that can run EVERYTHING. (You sure about that? - Ed.) Games are designed for low end PCs why not make them for high end PCs? Why the hell did I spend so much money with my new rig when I could have kept my old P2 400Mhz with TNT DDR 8mb graphics and still play all games to my heart's content. For years I've envied those with PC Behemoths but I've come to realise the below average is at least some sort of average (or something like that.) Take the C&C series - ALL are designed for pathetic PI 200 with 4mb graphics. Now Renegade I thought at least graphics can finally match gameplay, but then I learnt IT'S NOT.

That's why I love Max Payne finally a game that's got high-end PCs in mind!

Hopefully games will catch up to PCs in technical terms. Maybe a game might fully utilise the Geforce 2! (like someone said).

Phil Harrison

Granted, there are numerous instances of games coming out with, shall we say, moderate technical demands but equally there are games like Giants that have suffered at launch due to their high system requirements.

Most developers are now aware of the balancing act and make their products "scalable".

HALF-LIFE FOREVER

I just re-installed Half-Life for the 4th time. Usually when I take a game off my hard drive to make way for others it never returns from the bottom of my bedside drawer. The package stays on my shelf (because I love staring at my collection of games that I have PAID for... yes I pay.) but the CD usually never returns. Or if it does it's usually either used as a frisbee (Braveheart was thrown the hardest) or I give it to the homeboy down the road who likes to wear it attached to a chain around his neck.

Anyway, back to my story on Half-Life... I paid about \$70 for the game ages ago and thought it was a brilliant single player game. Throw in an Anti Terrorist shooter (Counter-strike), a team based adrenalin rush (TFC) and why not a free WW2 game to boot (DOD). Not to mention countless other FREE games to go with it!

Thanks to dedicated and extremely talented programmers (the modders) we get countless games with the one purchase... So this letter is just to say THANKYOU to all the people that create MODS. You give gamers a chance to experience new and exciting games and you ensure we do get VALUE for our dollar. I must go now because I have to install the Half-Life Master Sword Demo now so I can play it. Thanks PCPP - Keep it up!

AzzaDog

ABBREVIATION

I'm one of those players who while not playing everyday, does play a few times a week. And I get people laughing at my "lack of experience" just because I ask questions

LETTER OF THE MONTH

THE LOVE OF MY LIFE

I have moved from NSW to QLD and was recently accepted in to the Diploma in Information Technology (Software Development) "specialising in games" course that was discussed in Games School article in issue 68. As a result, I have been thinking quite a bit about my career once I have finished the course.

I recently read an article online saying that alot of the games topping the charts were those like The Sims and TV game show tie-ins like The Weakest Link. The reason that the author of the article gave for these games selling so well was that they were the sort of games that parents could buy for their kids (and themselves) to enjoy without resorting to the violence found in most games. I looked at the chart in the most recent issue of PCPP and found this to be somewhat true. However, I saw a few other games on there that caught my eye and provided a different reason. Those games were Civ 3, Yuri's Revenge, and Star Wars: Galactic Battlegrounds. Half the chart was taken up by strategy games. Strategy games are usually some of the most solid and playable games out there. On top of that, these strategy games are performing better than games which boast spectacular visuals etc. The Sims and Civ 3 have no story as such, yet both of them (including add on packs) combined take over a third of the sales charts and are quite fun to play. How valid are spectacular visuals and/or a good story to games nowadays?

This also gets me thinking about games currently in development, such as the new Doom game. The incomplete visuals are already jaw-dropping and id has stated that they will be concentrating solely on the single player experience, which I (and possibly alot of other people) assume will mean that there will be a persistent story throughout the game. The new Doom game will no doubt sell well, but will it still be in the charts 6 months later?

Within a year I will be working in the computer gaming industry, either as a part of an already established company or (ideally) with my own company. With my own company, I can attempt to make the games I want to make; with an already established company, I will get experience in the field and further understand what the public likes in their games. As a life long game player, I will be making sure that the games I am involved in will be fun for me to play, as that is always a start to making a playable game. After all, what is the point of making the games I want to play for a career if no one else wants to play them?

Ethan Watson

We found your original letter in Issue 38, you Mac loving Freak! Good luck mate and maybe some day soon, PCPP will be interviewing you.

like 'what's ROFL mean?' or what does "HWG" (Here we go - I just found out). Now, is it hard for people to just slow down and explain things? I get terribly vexed, when people use jargon that is beyond me, especially when it's in the mags I read (hint to Personal Computer Power Play...)

Now I've played online games like Mechwarrior 4, MechCommander2, Mechwarrior 3, Mechcommander 1, Quake 2 & 3, Half Life and Star Craft (which is probably the worst for "jargon" besides Counter-Strike). You may be thinking that I'm like 50 years old, but I'm only 21.

So next time when you're in a lobby full of players, please don't use jargon EXCESSIVELY, cause some maybe new, or some may not understand it.

Thanks.... I just wanted to get the off my chest. Rock On...

Heath "Coafius" Carruthers
Unanimous

At least, you didn't complain about 733+ speak. In any case, you shall overcome.

MOVIES & GAMES

In these past few weeks I have been to the cinemas a couple of times, both being MA 15+ movies. As my mate and I bought our tickets and entered the cinema it was requested upon us that we show proof that we are over 15. So, my friend and I happily flashed these \$14.50-an-hour Greater Union teenagers our probationary drivers licenses' and continued on our merry way.

Seeing as the suave one is a busy boy, in these past few weeks I have also naturally wandered into ye old Electronics Boutique whenever time permits to have a squiz at the new releases and such. It was then that I noticed that a baby-faced adolescent who didn't look a day over 12 took a copy of the MA 15+ rated RTCW off the shelves and took it to the counter where the conventional swapping of money for goods took place. It then occurred to me as it has numerous times in the past and for plenty of other people I'm sure, that anybody of any age can buy any game regardless of the censorship rating.

Now, as was very professionally pointed out by PCPP in #66, the OFLC ratings are in reality, recommendations made to state governments that can be enforced and administered as these governments see fit. The OFLC can give software a rating after giving it a thorough assessment and that end of the stick is all hunky dory. However, the reason a 12-year-old can buy an MA 15+ restricted game is because of the lack of enforcement and administering of these ratings.

Overhaul the system I say. Of course it

won't stop adults buying games for younger children but hey, 17 year olds don't drink or smoke now do they? It is a first step, a big first step and a necessary first step.

Suave (#pcpp)

Not all retailers are flogging illicit brain drugs to kids. There are many quality retailers who seek to maintain a good reputation and hence don't sell to kids. But until there is some impetus for all retailers to adhere to the guidelines, double standards like these will exist.

SHONKY PART III

In issue #71's LOTM, the writer suggests there are more "shonky" customers than dealers. I agree when the writer declares the "young bloke" shonky, because it was HE who overclocked it, causing it to "stuff up", but to go so far as to call a majority of complaining customers shonky and/or in issue 69, calling a majority of dealers shonky is wrong.

When faced with faulty equipment/games, MOST people do not realise that it was their own or their computer's fault, possibly because they wouldn't know about it or understand if they found out what it was.

On the other hand, dealers are not shonky, but rather lack common sense. How are you supposed to know if a game or other software is faulty, if you do not open it? If the seal is broken and the item is faulty, then they should replace it free. They should NOT charge anything to get a replacement, like one store did. They should also employ people who know what they are talking about.

That offer to install the card for ten dollars is worth it, and the "young bloke" should have accepted it, I know I would. I wish there were offers like those near me.

I love your magazine, especially now (thank God you got rid of that frequent graphic) and the new design keeps getting better. Keep up the good humour and please do not kill Timmy the Circle. I am looking forward to UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2, !7 !5 g0nn4 Ownz.

d3z3r7 r4t

We received an email from the original contact, Scorpion007, and he maintains his innocence in the whole affair and so we believe him - Inbox is not here to pass judgment. However, this is a good cautionary tale for buyers and sellers - know your legal rights, be aware of what you're doing and act honestly. The rest is up to Allah.

FROM THE FORUMS

Well, I was sitting here @ tafe and then booka! a new contact in my MSN comes up! I am like swoit! new friend! heheheheh.. and then when we start to chat I find out that it's like my friend I haven't spoken too for like 12 years!!! OMG! 12 years! I am like.... god bless MSN and all that use it... any of you ever had a similar experience?!?!?

Aussiedog - Peon

Yeah the internet helped me to find my friend from 18yrs ago...it is very cool

Tomcat - Pit Drone

It's a historic day guys, cause ROM has scored his first ever Ban.

So I am sad to say goodbye Madsen, and I hope at the next Forums he visits he will learn to stop his spamming ways.

He like wasted a whole four hours of my online time here, and that hurts, so the Ban is fair and just. Cya Madsen, learn your lesson well.

ROM - #1 FAN

It seems a bit harsh, I thought he was alright. but I will put my faith in the old-timers, er... forum old timers, not old meaning er you know "flounders"

grishnahk - Skaarj

I must admit this is an odd post, namely because I somehow think that no one will agree with me. Regardless I shall press on..

It is about EB's policy of being able to return a game you don't like. I can't stand that policy. I mean yes if they are going to make it available I can't blame people for using it but still I find it offensive that people can buy a game, decide they don't like it and get their money back. Personally I think that is stupid. You buy a game and you don't like it... tough! I vow I will never use this policy, I vow that I will always subscribe to the theory that before you buy a game, investigate it, play the demo, read the reviews and decide if you want it. If you buy and it still isn't your style, tough.

Am I just an insane person or does anyone else out there agree with me?

EIPresidente - Templar

I WON A VB COUNCH!!!! Well, actually my dad did, but it's in my room. It's bloody huge and now there's hardly any room to move in my tiny little room, but that doesn't matter because I have a VB couch!!

ktulu - Tiefling

...erm...w00t? Maybe someone could tell me what is so special about a blow-up (...it's bound to be) VB couch?

Johnny the Janitor - Grunt

Johnny take time out from computers once in a while and live life a little. anyone who wouldn't be excited by a vb couch or an equivalent (crownies included) seriously needs to get out more.

jhc - Pit Drone

Leisure Suit Larry



Ah Larry, you were so da man. Rest in Peace.



When 2D sprites go bad... or good



Is that you Liv?

Everything I know about seduction I owe to Leisure Suit Larry - this probably explains why I have a vast collection of hand creams and inflatable dolls, wear nothing other than polyester, start every pick up line with some form of subtle reference to the size of my penis and spend my spare time patrolling cruise ships looking for stray dildos so I can hopefully cop an eye-full of the captains boobies. Understandably this choice of lifestyle has earned me a fair amount of slaps, giggles and an inordinate amount of Saturday nights taking the problem in hand, but I stand by my decision to base my life on the exploits of the indomitable Larry Laffer for one reason alone. The little guy had heart.

Throughout 10 or more years of shattered dreams and lonely nights Larry has been raped no less than twice, defeated alien attack, molested his fair share of buxom women, been molested in turn by a larger number of more homely women and men with a penchant for spandex if you get my drift. No matter what

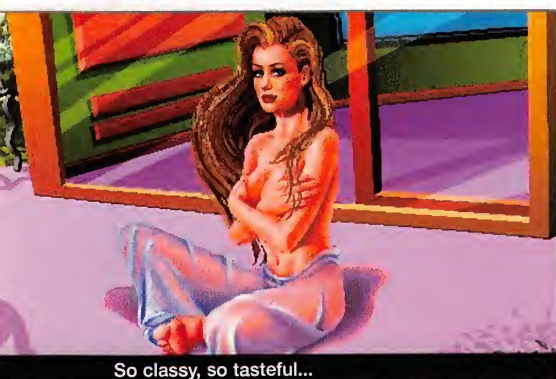
befell our hero on he would continue to pursue what he desired most. It matters not that all of his endeavors were directed towards getting a little slap and tickle or that his actions were quite often bordering on criminal. It doesn't matter that the vast majority of time he failed to woo the obscure object of his affection. What matters is that he never gave up. He never hung his head and realised that Ron Jeremy is a more attractive man than he is. He never took no for an answer. Larry Laffer is the poster-boy for the phrase "don't let the bastards get you down".

From his humble beginnings as a simply animated sprite chasing things that may or may not be women depending on the resolution your monitor could handle to the modern days of high resolution lovelies, Larry has remained a constant. Sure the suit may have changed over the years, going from Saturday Night Fever to Miami Vice in look but the man inside, the soul of the suit has not changed a bit. He is the rock, the pillar of strength, and the stable foundation to build a worldview on. Face it, anyone

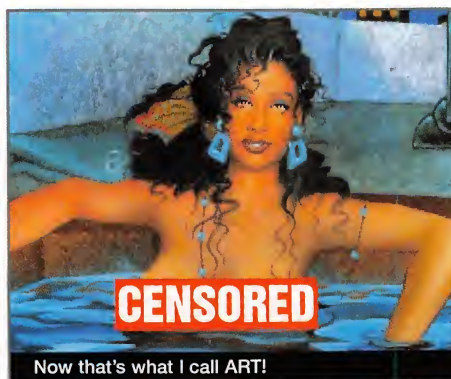
who can be rejected by pretty much every woman he's met in a decade and still come back for more is either the equal to the Dalai Lama in terms of placid emotional detachment or so incredibly medicated that he may as well be a llama. For either option you can make a fairly decent case that Larry is a guru.

Larry is not only a guru but also a teacher as well, an educator of the uneducated and teller of truths. Throughout his 7 games (8 if you include Larry Casino) Larry has opened us up to new ideas and expanded our horizons as human beings. Before Larry did we know that women could be seduced by the judicious application of mucilage, marital aids or KY jelly? Through Larry we learned about the world, about the opposite sex and about life, but I think, more importantly we learned a little something about ourselves. There's a little Larry in each of us just waiting to get out.

Daniel Wilks



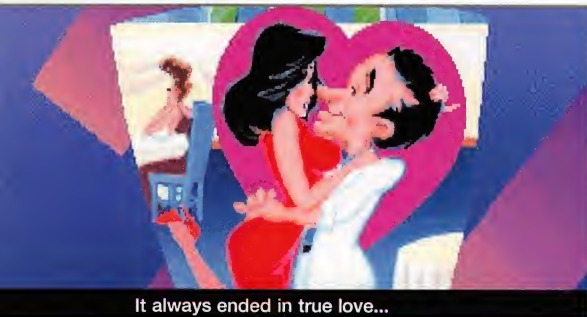
So classy, so tasteful...



Now that's what I call ART!



Uh... it's one of those sideshow clowns. Yeah, that's what it is.



It always ended in true love...



Hey, that's Roger Ramjet's girl



Now honey, there's a rational explanation for all of this...



LARRY'S ANGELS

Now that some of us have grown up from our initial tampering with the LSL franchise and have graduated to hardcore German snuff-porn we can see that the names of the vast majority of women were subtle yet effective double entendres designed to intrigue and entertain. Here are some of the names we like best.

Dewmi Moore
 Jamie Lee Coitus
 Nailme and Wydoncha Juggs
 Drew Baringmore
 Annette Boning
 Dr. Nonookie
 Victorian Principles
 Captain Thygh
 Chi Chi Lambada



Garth Brooks fan club... rowr!



Chick on Billiard Table... classy



Ho ho, now he's put his foot in it (You're fired - Ed)



Now everyone out there has no excuse to not have played Unreal. It's the classic shooter which some people say is better than Quake2. We've included the entire version for the princely sum of absolutely no dollars at all, right here on CD01. We've also included the latest patch and the OpenGL fix, so Unreal will run just tickety-boo on your high spec machines. Enjoy!

Paul Noone

CD01 - Demos

COMPLETE FREE GAME!



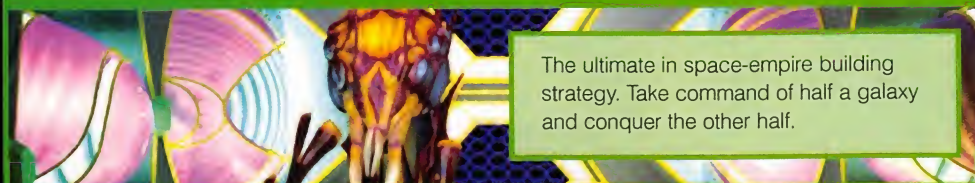
The classic shooter from the days of Quake2. Relive the way gaming used to be - fast and furious!

Requires

Pentium 3 450Mhz, 64Mb RAM, 300Mb free hard drive space, 16Mb Videocard, installation of DirectX8 (included). GeForce2 recommended



MASTER OF ORION 3



The ultimate in space-empire building strategy. Take command of half a galaxy and conquer the other half.

Requires

Pentium 3 450Mhz, 64Mb RAM, 300Mb free hard drive space, 8Mb Videocard, installation of DirectX8 (included). 128Mb RAM recommended

CDS



CD02 - Mods & Utils

MOD LIFE 073



Q3A Invasion 2.3.1

Didn't like AVP2? Want to see how some true fans treat the greatest sci-fi franchise ever? Want to kill lots of bugs? This one's for you.

Requires full registered Quake3 to play



AOK Tamerlane

Swap a few letters around and the title of this Age of Kings Campaign doesn't sound so hot. But still, this is a tasty morsel for RTS fans.

Requires full registered AOK to play



AOK Adar's Revenge

That horrible Adar. Him and his pesky revenge. Always with the revenge Adar, always the revenge. Still, it's a great campaign for Age of Kings.

Requires full registered AOK to play



AOK Forcing The Impossible

With a title that sounds like meeting deadlines for PCPP, this Age of Kings add-on campaign adds on a whole bunch of impossible new challenges

Requires full registered AOK to play



AOK The Nexus

Something called The Nexus can't be a good thing, and in this add-on campaign for Age of Kings you're bound to find out all about it, painfully.

Requires full registered AOK to play



AOK Magraith

Magraith? What kind of name is that? A dragon or a princess? A war-machine or some kind of mystic rock? Find out in this Age of Kings add-on.

Requires full registered AOK to play

SYSTEM



Creative Labs SB Drivers
IomegaWare Tools 3.1
Detonator XP 23.11
MS Jet DB Engine 3.5.1
Logitech Mouse 9.41.2

PATCHES & AUDIO



Counterstrike V1.3
Ashampoo Media Plyr
Audiogalaxy Satellite
BearShare
LimeWire
Media Jukebox
Morepheus +MORE!

UTILITIES



Adobe Acrobat Reader
5.05
DirectX 8.1
GetRight 4.5c
HyperSnap 4.20.0.0
SANDRA+ 2002 8.59f
StuffIt 7.0
WinRAR 2.90
Winzip 8.1
ZoneAlarm 2.6.362



Our DVD continues unabated! Packed to the gills with the latest demos, a free full version of Unreal and more exclusive free anime for you to watch in the comfort of your lounge-room. This month's episode is Part 1 of Orphen, which is kind of like Harry Potter but for people who like their magic schools to be a bit edgier. Tuck in and enjoy, and look for more exclusive video content on the disc! - **Paul Noone**

INSTRUCTIONS

The majority of the files on this disk are compressed and will require an appropriate extraction utility in order to open them. Winzip, as well as many other helpful tools, are located in the Utilities section of the CD2 link.

We cannot offer opinions or support for the software included on this DVD but should you have any legitimate enquiries about the DVD's functionality you may send an email to - cdgod@next.com.au.

Welcome to DVD, but be warned: this is not as simple as running a CD! The DVD disc is a Hybrid, including both the DVD movie and DVD-ROM components. The movie should play in most set-top players as well as DVD-ROM drives that support hybrid (mixed media) DVDs. The ROM component (all the software you're looking for) is only readable in a PC DVD-ROM drive that can read DVD-R and DVD-RW discs. We cannot give assurances as to whether it will play in any particular drive. Please check with the manufacturer of your drive for compatibility.

The DVD-ROM component is set to autostart. If it doesn't, simply run the file called Start.htm in the root directory.

Should you have any problems with this DVD please send an email to cdgod@next.com.au. If the DVD is damaged you can receive a replacement by posting the DVD to the reply paid address below. Please post your faulty DVD within a month of purchase, or we may not be able to replace it! Please remember to include your return address.

PC Powerplay
DVD Returns
Reply Paid 634
Redfern NSW 2016


FREE ANIME! - Works on your set-top DVD, or with a DVD-decoder on your PC



ORPHEN New Anime!


When the school of magic loses its top student, all hell breaks loose as a cast of crazy and dangerous characters quest to get the little tike back.

MORE CONTENT THAT YOU CAN COMFORTABLY STUFF UP YOUR NOSE!




BONUS DEMOS!


C&C Renegade



Motoracer 3



Medal of Honour



**UNREAL FREE!
Full Version**

Quite simply, it's an awesome shooter and it's free. What more do you need?

System Requirements

Pentium 2 400Mhz, 64Mb RAM, 16Mb Videocard, 1Gb HDD space. Please install the included Unreal patch for trouble-free gaming

VIDEO CONTENT!



**XBOX
Video tells all!**

This 7 minute video contains an interview with Seamus Blackley, the head of XBOX at Microsoft. Find out why the biggest OS developer in the world wants to do games.

GAMES CHEAP AS CHIPS!

17 Games!

17 tiny but fun games from Kool Dog - trial versions that cost less than \$5 to upgrade to full copies!

DVD



Contains full contents of CD PowerPlay! See page 110

EXCLUSIVE DEMO!



MASTER OF ORION 3 You too can rule the universe!

It's the king of sci-fi turn-based empire-building strategy. Don't believe us? Read our massive 6 page preview on page 38, then play this exclusive demo for yourself!

ALSO INCLUDES: Renegade, Divided Ground, Die Hard, MotoRacer 3, Bridge Commander

Requires Pentium 3 450, 64Mb RAM, 8Mb videocard. 128Mb RAM recommended

ADD-ON CAMPAIGNS!

AGE OF KINGS Five addon campaigns!



Five new campaigns for the greatest historical RTS in the world. Action! Adventure! Even swashbuckling! (Swash not included)

Requires full version of Age of Empires, Age of Kings to work



ROM's BUNKER - Extra goodies too tasty to fit on an ordinary coverdisc

Over 300Mb of maps, utilities and extras loving assembled by PowerPlay's #1 Fan and website newshound, ROM. Boot up the DVD for details, and enjoy!



Quake3 Maps



UT Maps



Half-Life Bots



System Requirements

Most items in ROM's Bunker require full registered versions of Q3A, Half-Life, Unreal Tournament and Return to Castle Wolfenstein



YellowBoots
YellowBoots

THE DEATH OF THE BOOTS

There are 10,000 stories in the ugly city. This has been one of them

This is an extraordinary

story about an ordinary man and an ordinary pair of yellow boots. I was that man. And they were my boots.

Consider if you will the bright lights of Las Vegas. Consider if you can, a rag-tag group of Australian PC games reviewers staring, jaws agape at the great pillars of neon and glass, the titanic temples erected to the great god Greed and the extra-mushy McDonalds. Imagine me, the boots, my crazy ex-third flatmate and several lesser personalities exhausted after a week's hectic coverage of gaming, collapsing with something like bone-weary relief into the webbing of a C-130 Hercules military transporter which was the only plane leaving Vegas in time for us to get to LAX to be delayed by the Space Shuttle ditching its main fuel tank over the Pacific without due care or proper consideration of others.

The cargo hold of a C-130 is a cold and windy place to be, but we didn't care, we were that tired. We knew it would be a smooth, 45 minute flight across the Nevada desert back to the great galactic toilet that was Los Angeles and we also knew we wouldn't be getting either a packed of salted nuts or an opportunity to look up the skirt of a passing cabin attendant. In any case, knowing my luck that attendant would probably have turned out to be male. Relaxing, I even went so far as to unlace the boots, so we could all get a little air.

'That was one hell of a show,' remarked my crazy ex-third flatmate. Oddly enough he wasn't referring to the International Games Festival but to another show we had taken in... later in the evening. There was also the matter of the bet and the tank full of lions at the MGM Grand. That escapade had cost us our entire supply of band-aids and iodine.

It was while we were reflecting on all these events and wearing little wistful smiles that the tenor of the C-130's turbo-prop engines changed from a dull grind into a screaming roar. The plane lurched a little, but after a few quizzical glances (it was now too loud to talk) we thought nothing of it. Then the captain opened the PA.

'Uh hi to everyone travelling back there, we've got a sensor warning on the brakes, just a temperature warning, nothing to worry about, so we've just stuck them outside for a bit. Don't worry, we're not going to harm anyone, I've got a wife and six kids at home and I don't want to die.' I suppose the captain thought these words would come across as kindly and reassuring, but they fell literally on deaf ears because at that moment the cargo bay doors fell off.

Now, I know that after the captain extinguishes the fasten safety-belts light you're supposed to keep the belt buckled at all times when seated in case of, ah hah, unforeseen turbulence, but what with me being a seasoned traveller and my crazy ex-third flatmate also being a veteran of a dozen Tokyo Games Shows, well, the sudden pressure-drop sucked our un-belted personages toward the back of the plane so within a space of about three seconds we found ourselves dangling 20,000 feet above the Nevada desert, with me hanging on to some kind of strap and my crazy ex-third flatmate hanging on to the boots.

Both the boots and my crazy ex-third flatmate at this point uttered some soft-mouthed expletive which was whipped away by the howling wind. Now the thing with a C-130 is that it's a plane that's designed to fly around with its cargo bay doors open, so our charming flight crew probably didn't even realise that two of their passengers were



dangling paradoxically thousands of feet above the ground but inches from certain death. The other representatives of Australia's gaming media regarded us with interest but not much real concern; we were after all, the competition.

It was at this point that the boots reminded me that they were unlaced and my crazy ex-third flatmate attempted bizarrely to climb back into the plane by shaking my ankles vigorously. I felt the boots begin to slip.

'Hey be cool!' I screamed.

'What?' replied my crazy ex-third flatmate, and began shaking all the harder.

And then, the astounding bit. Even as the boots came free of my stockinged feet leaving, you would have thought, my crazy ex-third flatmate with nothing but two handfuls of quality leather, he somehow managed to let go of the boots and flip himself forward over my ankles and then, using the miracle of aerodynamics, back into the cargo hold while simultaneously pulling me back in and, I guess, saving my life.

PCPP#74 on sale May 8th will be chock full of all the goodies John brought back from the UK, a review of **Tony Hawk Pro Skater 3**, and piles of other tasty goodies. And for those folks panicking, the XBOX section will be back down to 6 pages.

The whole thing happened so quickly that we had plenty of time to turn around and watch the boots plunge away from the back of the plane, turn lazily through the air a few times and then disappear into a cloud. I blinked.

'Geez your shoes, sorry man,' said my crazy ex-third flatmate casually and resumed both his seat and his position in the German gaming mag he was pretending to be able to read in order to impress the female editor.

And that I guess is that. Gone in a flash. The boots, who had stuck with me for so long, lost in an instant, splattered all over the Nevada desert, food for lonely Coyotes and tumbleweeds.

Which left me out of a job. Without the boots I was nothing. Back in Australia, the so-called 'real life' staffers of PCPP didn't want to know me. Where are the boots? they said. I couldn't answer, not without breaking down.

So I go, off into the sunset, trailing a USB cable, and a few loose pages of game developer anecdotes, a lonely man in a pair of dirty black socks.



Have you done your "CASE" study?

We are talking about Aluminium Cases!

You may have the latest and fastest CPU and VGA cards. Do you have the best case to house all the greatest components? Aluminium cases dissipate heat 3 times faster than the traditional steel cases and when Lian Li builds it, your PC experience is guaranteed luxurious. Here are some comments:

apc Australian Personal Computer

"Lian Li cases are legendary among PC enthusiasts and case-modders, and are generally considered to be the Rolls Royce of aftermarket PC cases. Not only because they are comparatively expensive, but because their features and attention to detail warrant the price."

PC PowerPlay

"A stunner. All aluminium and built to withstand a direct nuclear strike in the megaton range. As we have mentioned more than once, we even dropped this case down a flight of concrete steps and it barely flinched. Ten bays keep everything snug, three extra fans keep it cool, and slide-off covers and a motherboard tray mean it's ready for upgrade action any time".

See detail reviews (search "Lian Li") at

www.dansdata.com
www.overclockers.com.au
www.gamingin3d.com

All cases come without power supplies

Aluminium Tower Cases



PC-60USB
Silver full aluminium anodised
\$390 RRP



PC-65USB
With transparent side panel
\$475 RRP



PC-12B
Powder coated external with full aluminium inside
\$320 RRP

Common features

- ◆ Sliding tray for motherboard
- ◆ 2 front ball bearing fans with filter
- ◆ 1 rear ball bearing fan
- ◆ Selectable fan speed control
- ◆ Thumbscrew
- ◆ 490x210x450mm
- ◆ 12 total bay 4x 5.25", 3x3.5", 5x3.5 Hidden



PC-70
Silver full aluminium anodised
\$539 RRP



PC-71
Black full aluminium anodised
\$559 RRP

- ◆ 2 front ball bearing fans with filter
- ◆ 2 rear ball bearing fan
- ◆ Selectable fan speed control
- ◆ Thumbscrew
- ◆ 210X595X588mm.
- ◆ Suitable for dual CPU M/B.
- ◆ 15 total bay



PC-5 Economic
Beige Colour powder coated
\$199 RRP



PC-6 Economic
Silver colour powder coated
\$199 RRP

- ◆ 2 front fans with filter
- ◆ 1 rear fan
- ◆ Selectable fan speed control
- ◆ Thumbscrew
- ◆ 490x210x450mm
- ◆ 12 total bay 4x 5.25", 3x3.5", 5x3.5 Hidden

Aluminium Server Cases



PC-72SCA
Silver full aluminium anodised
◆ SCA-2 hot swap bays supports SCSI Ultra160
◆ SCA-2 backplane module
◆ 2x16cm ball bearing fans
◆ Selectable fan speed control
◆ Thumbscrew
◆ 589x209x574mm
◆ 13 total bays
\$790 RRP



PC-626
Silver full aluminium anodised
270x665x498mm
◆ 14 total device bays
4x5.25, 3x3.5, 8x3.5 hidden for HDD
◆ 4 x 12cm two ball-bearing
Suitable for dual CPU M/B
◆ On SCA version: SCA-2 Hot Swap bays, Support Ultra 160, SCA-2 backplane module
\$1190 RRP, SCA \$1390 RRP



PC-76
Silver full aluminium anodised
◆ 20 total bays 6x5.25, 2x3.5, 12x3.5 hidden
◆ 6 ball-bearing cooling fan
◆ 265x559x630mm
◆ Suitable for dual CPU M/B
\$990 RRP



PC-78
Silver full aluminium anodised
◆ 20 total device bays
6x5.25, 2x3.5, 12x3.5 hidden for HDD
◆ 4x 8cm two ball-bearing fan
2x 12cm two ball-bearing fan
◆ Suitable for dual CPU M/B (Max size: 12x13)
\$1650 RRP

Case accessories



PANEL-65
Silver colour aluminium
Transparent side panel to suit PC-60USB \$85 RRP

PANEL-75
Silver colour aluminium
Transparent side panel to suit PC-70USB \$115 RRP



FE-525
Silver Aluminium Front Easy
Access all PC ports at the front of the PC \$90 RRP



T-4 / T-4B
Dual thermometer
Silver / Black Monitor
CPU/MB/HDD temp
\$59 RRP



MF-30HDD
Expansion mounting kit
Add 3 more HDD space to PC cases
\$19 RRP



F-7 / C-2 / C-4 / C-6
Aluminium bezels for FDD and popular CDROMs
CDROM/DVD models: Sony-CDU-5211, Pioneer DVD-116, TEAC-CD-540E
From \$9.90 RRP



EX-12S
SCA-2 Module
SCA-2 Ultra-160
Hot swap module.
Takes 2x 5.25" bay space
\$270 RRP

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Video Editing Studio: Edit analog and DV videos
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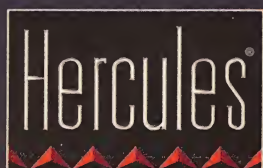
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